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CASTE AND CREED.

CASTE AND CREED:

A NOVEL

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BY

MRS FRANK PENNY.

"Pity and need
Make all flesh kin. There is no caste in blood,
Which runneth of one hue, nor caste in tears,
Which trickle salt with all; neither comes man
To birth with tilka-mark stamped on the brow,
Nor sacred thread on neck. Who doth right deeds
Is twice-born, and who doth ill deeds vile."
EDWIN ARNOLD in "*The Light of Asia.*"

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PREFACE.

A RESIDENCE of some years in the Madras Presidency, during which I was brought daily into close contact with Eurasian Christians of various social standing, has led me to pen this tale of "Caste and Creed."

The subject is one that now-a-days forces itself on the notice of our Anglo-Indian countrymen, and cannot be ignored. Vague and often false notions respecting it widely prevail. Though baptised into and brought up generally in the Christian Faith (that of the father), the Eurasians are necessarily exposed to great temptations and trials through their heathen relatives, and through the inherent weakness of their nature.

The sad contrast between the philosophy of the Hindus' sacred books, and the exist-

ing practice of their religion is startling, whilst the gorgeous pageantry of their festivals makes the simple Christian worship appear cold and unattractive. I have not ventured, in describing these, to do more than touch upon the gross immoralities connected with the existing idolatrous worship of the Hindus; and I may have laid myself open to unfriendly criticism by alluding to them at all.

I have tried to avoid all exaggeration and false sentiment, and to represent the force of heredity in our Eurasian fellow-subjects fairly and faithfully, in the hope that more compassionate sympathy and kind consideration may be extended to them than, in my own experience, they have hitherto received from British residents in India.

CASTE AND CREED

CHAPTER I.

TEMPTATION.

"Temptations hurt not, though they have accesse,
Satan o'ercomes none but by willingnesse."
HERRICK.

DONALD ANDERSON was very weary and hot, although it was only just five o'clock in the afternoon. He leaned back in his office chair, and called impatiently to the punkah-men to pull more vigorously. Then he poured out a glass of cool clear water from the porous earthenware goblet by his side, and drank a long deep draught.

He had had a busy day, and had transacted a good deal of business one way and another, which in other words meant making money. Nothing had occurred to cause him fatigue except the heat and dust, the mosquitoes, and the noise of the busy world which he himself had created around the office.

As he put down his glass, one of the messengers of the office—known in Southern India as peons—came into the spacious room.

"Well! what is it?" exclaimed the wearied man.

He had just decided on giving up work for the day, and on taking a ride before the darkness of the tropics came on.

"Ramalingam asks to see the master."

Donald made a gesture of impatience, hesitated for a moment, and, thinking of the rupees he was so eager to gather, signified to the peon that he would see the man. But it meant that he must forego the evening ride; for Ramalingam's business would take some time to discuss.

The peon left the office, and almost immediately after his departure Ramalingam entered.

As he did so, Anderson touched a bell on his table—the signal for the busy clerks and attendants to stop work. There was a hum of voices in the next room, and the muffled shuffle of bare feet upon the matted floor. Through the wide archways the crowd of native writers could be seen closing their books, and moving out into the deep verandahs. They were a fat, well-fed set of Hindus, with the usual placid, expressionless countenance of the Oriental. Although scrupulously neat in person, they were redolent of cocoanut oil and betel-nut.

The loose white coats and large turbans gleamed with a golden light in the rays of the setting sun, harmonising with their smooth brown skins, as they walked in groups along the private road that led from the house.

Ramalingam bowed low to the rich enterprising merchant of Trichinopoly as he entered the room; folding his hands, he waited patiently till the hum of the stirring clerks had subsided.

He was a fair man compared with the Hindus of the South. His frame was sinewy and well-knit, as though he had spent his youth in the saddle, or in pursuing the tiger and the stag through the jungles which bordered his estate. He was a zemindar, or land owner. His estates were situated on the banks of the Cauvery river, the Nile of Southern India, whose fertile waters brought wealth and prosperity to the dwellers in Tanjore and Trichinopoly.

Ramalingam came to Anderson to dispose of his crops of rice, sugar-cane, and grain.

Anderson bought the crops as they stood, and sent his own carts, drawn by fine Mysore cattle, to bring away the produce. Men like the zemindar appreciated the benefits of the ready-money down, and the quittance of all risk of the road. The merchant found himself master of an enormous and lucrative trade, with not a soul to oppose him.

It was now the end of one of the half-yearly seasons, and Ramalingam had the produce of some thousands of acres to sell. Anderson's agent had already visited the estate and valued the crops. It only remained for the buyer and seller to agree to, the price.

In accordance with an old Oriental custom, the zemindar always prefaced all his transactions with a handsome present. Anderson made it a rule to fall in with the ways of his clients whenever honesty was not called in question. He received the presents graciously, and took them into account when he purchased the goods offered.

This time Ramalingam brought a chain of fine gold wire, worth about fifty rupees. It was a smaller gift than usual, and the fact did not escape the eye of the Scotchman. He took the trinket, and laid it by his side on the office table.

The affair took longer to arrange than usual, and after twenty minutes the two men were no nearer the desired end than when they began.

At last Ramalingam said, with a deprecating smile,—

"Your honour is a little hard to deal with this afternoon; yet I have not omitted to bring the usual gift."

Donald fingered the chain, and the quick-witted Hindu divined the unspoken thought

that was passing through the merchant's brain. The value of the trinket was a mere drop in the ocean compared with the sums which were spoken of.

Ramalingam leaned forward and said, with a meaning glance,—

"Perhaps your honour does not know that there is a little gift outside, left with the servants."

"You have something outside, have you? Then we may possibly come to terms more easily. Is it of the same value as the last?"

"Your honour will value it even more," replied Ramalingam.

Once more the men bargained. The man's last offering was a beautiful Persian mare, which Anderson sold to one of the English officers in the battery of artillery, stationed at Trichinopoly, for something over a thousand rupees. If there was just such another standing in the stables, there was no need to haggle over the thousand rupees, which seemed the stumbling block.

Anderson conceded the point; he agreed to give Ramalingam his price; and rather hurriedly closed the interview by writing the necessary cheque. As the zemindar took the slip of paper, Donald said,—

"I hope she is a beauty."

"She is as fair as the morning, and as beautiful as the newly-opened lotus-bud."

With this flowery speech he vanished; and in a few moments Donald saw him ambling away on his fat white Pegu pony.

The tired merchant put away his papers, and locked the table drawers. His chokra, or valet, brought him a fragrant cup of coffee and a cheroot. It was too late to go out riding, for the sun already touched the horizon. A drive along the red dusty roads was not inviting. There was nothing to be done but stroll about the well-kept grounds, or wander along the raised bank of the Wyaconda channel.

The muddy but fertile waters of this canal were drawn from the great Cauvery itself, and its banks were a mass of luxuriant vegetation. Palms, tamarinds, mangoes, babul-trees grew by the waterside, out of beds of velvet-green caladiums, and silvery pampas-grass.

Donald loved his garden. He had laid it out with taste, and extended it to the very water's edge. It was a fitting adjunct to the noble house, that was a very palace in size and extensiveness.

Anderson passed through a suite of rooms to a large central hall. Here was a billiard table, rarely used, which took up but a small space in the big room. A fountain played in the centre of the hall; round it were ranged beautiful foliage plants and ferns, which were carefully tended by gardeners.

He passed on to his own apartments, a sitting-room, bedroom, dressing-room, and bathroom. The latter was furnished with a large marble swimming-bath, that looked cool and inviting. The furniture was of massive carved blackwood, an Indian wood little inferior to ebony. It had all been wrought by the patient Hindu carver. Strange deities, intertwined with cobras and fantastic reptiles, ornamented bed, dressing-tables, wardrobes, looking-glass, and even punkah-frame. It was upholstered in rich Oriental fabrics from the looms of Northern India.

Donald did not allow luxury to take a firm hold upon him; yet he liked to surround himself with artistic things which pleased his eye, whilst they ministered to his comfort.

Money was plentiful, and it was plentifully spent, when he was so inclined. It had pleased him to watch the carpenters and wood-carvers, as they worked under his eye for months, until piece after piece of furniture was finished.

But this evening he paid no attention to his richly-furnished room. He was intent only on plunging his head into the great marble basin of his washstand. The water cooled his heated brain, and he emerged from his room refreshed. He turned his steps towards the garden, intending to go through it to the stables. He

wanted to satisfy his mind about the horse that Ramalingam had presented.

He reached the stables and called to his groom.

"Bring out the horse that the zemindar left to-day."

"He left no horse, Sahib," replied the man.

At that moment an old grey-haired native woman came towards him from the servant's quarters. By her side was one of the prettiest little maids Donald had ever seen. She was a beautiful child of twelve, as fair as one of the daughters of Southern Europe. She was dressed in Brahmin fashion, in a rich, orange-coloured saree.

"Some relations of one of my clerks wanting an increase of salary, I suppose," thought Donald.

The woman made a low salaam, and bade her companion do the same. The merry child hid her face timidly in the woman's cloth, and peeped roguishly at the Scotchman. The old lady became impatient, and gave the girl a push towards the master.

Gathering courage, she left the sheltering cloth, and threw herself down before him. She placed her little hands upon his feet as he stood there, and touched them with her forehead in humble obeisance.

"What do you want?" asked Donald, not unkindly, though he was tired, and ill-inclined to hear petitions just now.

"We are yours. We own no other master. We will eat your rice and serve you faithfully," replied the woman.

Donald looked mystified. He recognised the Brahmin cloth, and knew that the woman was not one of his servants. Besides, as far as he knew, he kept no women servants in his bachelor establishment.

"Are you the wife or mother of one of my clerks?" he asked.

"No, Sahib. We have no husband, nor son, nor brother. You are our father, our brother, and our husband," she rejoined, using an Oriental expression.

"What do you mean?"

"Ramalingam has given us to your honour. This little maid will prove a solace in many a dull hour; and I will be her mother-in-law, and guard her safely from other men's eyes."

Donald listened in angry silence. He knew well enough now what the woman meant. This, then, was the gift that the zemindar alluded to as having been left in charge of the servants.

It was no valuable horse, but this beautiful rosebud, that would soon open out in the early tropical summer of her youth into the perfect Eve-like woman.

Never had such a thing happened to Donald Anderson throughout his career. His upright, Presbyterian nature rebelled

against the situation. After a few moments of silence, during which his anger grew, he said,—

"Go! Take the child away. I want nothing from such as you are."

The woman fell at his feet, and began to entreat him.

"Oh, Sahib, do not send us away. Ramalingam will not take us back. The child, though born of Brahmin caste, is an outcast through no fault of its own. We shall starve if your honour sends us out into the world. There is room and to spare in your honour's compound, where we might hide ourselves for a while, till I can find a husband for the little one."

Donald called his butler, who was looking on at a distance with some curiosity.

"Take this woman and the child to the godowns. Let them stay there for a time; and see they have food, and what else they want."

He paused and gazed at the maid, who had crept timidly behind the woman. The little girl smiled as she caught his eye, and showed her pearly teeth between her ripe red lips. Something in the intelligent look brought a sudden thought into his mind.

"Tell Abboy Naidoo, the writer, to teach this child to read and write," he said to the butler.

Then, dismissing the subject from his

mind, the handsome young merchant wandered off to the garden and down the banks of the Wyaconda channel. The arums and caladiums reflected their heart-shaped leaves in the still sluggish stream; the sedge-warbler twittered a sleepy song in the thick pampas-grass on the opposite side. The hum of the busy bazaar in the distance —thronged with Sepoys and their camp-followers—fell faintly on his ear, reminding him of the large town and its strange people. With it came the thought of the innocent child so shamelessly sold by Ramalingam to the European.

The zemindar had known Donald for some time, and had had many transactions with him. In every one of these the Scotchman had shown himself the soul of uprightness and honesty.

Was this, then, the only lesson his conduct had taught? Did the native think that the European was not one whit better than the sensual Hindu?

"Bah!" exclaimed Donald at last. "It is a detestable country, and a disgusting people."

With this sweeping and somewhat unjust assertion, he forcibly put aside all further thought of the child and her guardian. He firmly resolved to send her back in a few days to Ramalingam, under charge of a peon, who should also carry a very severe letter.

CHAPTER II.

MARRIAGE IS HONOURABLE IN ALL.

"Heart on her lips and soul within her eyes,
Soft as her clime and sunny as her skies."—BYRON.

FOUR years passed, and Donald was still building up his fortunes with varying, but ever-increasing, success. The child and the old woman vanished from his sight, and also from his mind. They were still living on his charity, duly fed and clothed by the stately Tamil butler, who never vouchsafed a word that was not absolutely necessary.

His duty was to carry out an order until it was cancelled by a counter order. This was done to the letter, without question or remark. He looked after his master's interests in the house, ruled the gang of servants with the autocratic and unquestioned authority of a domestic rajah; and his master, in return, trusted him.

Anderson knew that the butler would allow no one else to rob him, even if he secured the perquisites himself. He entrusted him with the expenditure of the usual monthly sum required to keep up

the establishment, and was never troubled about the details of the housekeeping.

Through the master's want of curiosity and his forgetfulness, and through the Tamil's taciturnity, Donald was absolutely unaware that he still retained such a charge as the young outcast Brahmin girl on the premises. The long stretch of servants' buildings that bordered the two sides of the great court-yard might have hidden many such from the master's eye.

One day he was sitting in the wide-pillared verandah of his house, smoking a cheroot. His feet were up on the long arms of his chair, and the paper he had been reading had dropped upon the floor.

It was Sunday, and the office was closed. The army of clerks and peons were enjoying the seventh day's rest in their own houses, or in the busy streets of the big town.

The open space outside the office, where the mango and the tamarind trees cast a pleasant shade, was unoccupied, save for the green parrots that flew shrieking from tree to tree. The patient white bullocks were resting in the airy cattle-sheds beyond the stables, happy in the absence of their noisy drivers.

Donald had been to the garrison church that morning, for he was a man who observed the Sabbath with rigorous fidelity. The same upright spirit of honesty which

made him so scrupulously just to man, made him also just to himself and his God. He inherited all the religious superstition of his race; and, as his character was strong, his spiritual instincts were also strong. On no account would he transact any business whatever on Sunday. He would see no one, answer no letter, nor even read one that related to office work.

Occasionally he dined at a friend's house on Sunday; but the busy life he led was not conducive to sociability. His neighbours gradually learnt to let him go his own way. They welcomed him warmly when he showed himself at mess or club gatherings, but never sought him.

Had he been within reach of the Scotch kirk, he would not have been found at the English service. There was no Scotch kirk nearer than Madras or Bangalore, therefore he went every Sunday to the church of the cantonment.

The church-going conscientiously accomplished, Sunday was afterwards a day of rest, and he idled it away between eating, sleeping, and reading.

To-day, as he sat drowsily listening to the "tink, tink" of the coppersmith bird in the big banyan tree, he was aroused by the light fall of a woman's foot. The jingle of silver bangles on the ankles told him that it was a native.

He looked up and saw an old woman whose face seemed familiar. She was leading a girl of great beauty by the hand. As the Scotchman's astonished gaze rested on the maiden, her cheeks flushed like the nectarine under the southern sun. Her features were small and delicate, but as regular as those of a Grecian woman. Her eyes were of a hazel brown, large and expressive, and veiled by a fringe of long, curled lashes.

Beautiful as her face was, it scarcely equalled the perfect form of her figure, which seemed the embodiment of grace and youth. Untrammelled with the confining garments of the English woman, nature had been left to itself, and had developed a harmony of soft curves and rounded limbs. As the girl moved along on her bare feet—guiltless of shoes and high heels—her undulating motions enhanced the beauty of face and form.

The old woman came forward and made a low salaam.

"May the great Father of all ever bless your honour for the food and shelter you have given us these past years," she said.

The girl stood shyly by, and the woman looked round at her, bidding her thank the master.

Timidly, but with infinite grace, she did as she was told. To Donald's great surprise, she said, in excellent English,—

"My guardian and I have much to thank you for. You have been very kind in allowing us to live here. I also thank you on my own account for the education you have given me."

She paused, and there was a silence, during which Donald's usually well-regulated mind was in a turmoil. With the characteristic quickness and innate honesty of the man, he blamed himself for having forgotten the girl; for never having taken steps to restore her to her people; or to place her under the care of the missionary and his wife who lived and worked in Trichinopoly. He had allowed the cares of money-making to interfere with his duty towards his neighbour. He had done the girl a wrong.

"I had really forgotten your existence," spoke out Donald, in unvarnished frankness; "I must make inquiries, and send you back to your people."

"The zemindar has gone on a pilgrimage to the far north," said the old woman.

The girl's fair face clouded with anxiety.

"Sir, if you send me to the zemindar, my fate will be worse than death."

"What am I to do with you, then?' exclaimed he, thoroughly perplexed.

"Can I not remain for the present under the charge of your butler, as before? I have received nothing but kindness from him; and if I might also continue my studies, I should be glad."

The girl said this with the quiet dignity of an educated and thoughtful mind.

The old woman, who still remembered how and why the child was brought, came forward and spoke.

"It is a pity that so beautiful a flower should remain unplucked. In this country, when the fruit is ripe, the hand of man never fails to gather it."

Donald understood, and so did the girl. The latter glanced sharply at the Scotchman, and saw nothing but wrath in his face. Laying her hand quickly upon the old hag's shoulder, she pushed her back, and in peremptory tones told her to go. Donald added his word to the command, and the woman crept away crestfallen and grumbling.

The two glanced at each other, and Donald recognised the fact that his companion had been moved by the same sense of honesty as himself. A new feeling of respect for the girl took possession of him.

Perhaps, with that wonderful intuition which is the second nature of the Oriental, she divined the thought of the man, and had spoken accordingly. From whatever cause she had uttered the words which dismissed the temptress, they formed the first link which was woven to bind the shrewd Scotchman to this warm-hearted, passionate child of the tropics.

"By all means stay," he said.

The girl made the usual salaam, and turned to go.

"Stop a moment. Tell me what you have learnt during these four years."

In simple language she described her studies, and gave an account of the books she had read. They had been taken from his own library by the writer, and lent to her.

Donald found himself more interested than he thought possible. As she talked, her beautiful face grew animated and full of changing expression. He watched her as she spoke—the soft evening light playing upon her features—and forgot how the time went by. For fully an hour she remained by his side. Then, seeming to remember that she ranked only as one of his servants, she made a low obeisance and left him.

The next day Donald was plunged again in his office work. At rare intervals the beautiful face came before him in his thoughts; but he was a strong-willed man, and he smiled as he beat the vision successfully away. If it had remained in his hands, the matter would have gone no further. He was not to be easily conquered by a woman, and he would not have sought the girl again.

But with her it was different. She knew, well enough, what her position in the house was, and what it might be. Ambition

suggested to her mind the possibility of becoming the legitimate mistress of that large house, and its princely retinue of servants. Her heart went with her ambition, for Donald's kindly notice had touched her warm nature. He was fair to look upon; a fine, handsome man, in every way calculated to attract the eye of the soft, brown-eyed woman. She knew that she aimed at something high, for he would offer her nothing less than marriage.

On the other hand, if she did not win this handsome Briton, what was left to her but the fearful fate of being linked to one of the heavy, sensual clerks in the office? No!—a thousand times no! She would never bow to such a fate. Better end her life at once in the sacred waters of the Cauvery.

So it happened that, when the busy day was over, and the master wandered restfully in his beautiful garden, among the gardenias, the jasmine, the Persian roses, and the pale white moon-flowers, he often met this lovely Indian maiden.

She always had a smile for him, and was ready to talk or to listen. They spoke of the books he had recommended her to read, and he was astonished at the subtlety of her mind. She seemed to grasp the subjects thoroughly, and frequently argued plausibly, if not correctly. This aroused

the best part of Donald's nature into speech, and he endeavoured to replace her somewhat heathenish views with higher Christian teaching. Then, like a child at his feet, she seemed to learn better things.

It was a dangerous situation for the Scotchman. No man can talk to a beautiful woman, and tell her his best and noblest thoughts, without creating a strong bond of sympathy between them. If the two are unbound by any other tie, it is an easy step from sympathy to love.

Before many weeks had passed, the mail-coat of reserve and coldness was penetrated, and the tender arms of the entwining tropical flower were folding closely round the stiff fir-tree of northern climes.

One evening, the two were seated under a mango tree, that spread its boughs down to the very edge of the still waters of the Wyaconda. Both were silent. He was watching the liquid silver of the moonbeams as they lay on the face of the channel. She, woman-like, was watching him, her darling, her idol, though she had not dared yet to call him so. She was waiting for him to break the silence.

On the previous evening she put her fate to the touch by suggesting that she should seek some employment. She could teach; and, doubtless, Mrs Stainer, the missionary's wife, could find her a post as

mistress in one of the girls' schools she was about to establish.

Donald said nothing in reply at the time, but he was manifestly startled. She then left him, and this was their first meeting since.

The soft moonlight played in chequered patterns of yellow light at their feet, as the wind moved the leaves of the mango above their heads. The warm evening air was scented with the waxen flowers of the pagoda tree, which strewed the ground with its flake-like blossoms, sweeter in death than in life. A green snake came out of the grass close by, and glided noiselessly and unheeded to the water's edge. It dipped its trailing length into the silvery ripples, and swam across to the opposite side, leaving a sinuous path in wavelets upon the water.

"You spoke yesterday of leaving me. Do you really wish to go?" said Donald at last, without turning his head.

The girl made no reply and he glanced round at her. His troubled eyes met the warm, soft gaze of a woman's love, a love that made no attempt at hiding itself, a love devoid of shyness. She came of a race that never learns to hide its emotions, and she mutely spoke what was in her heart. The passionate soul went out unrestrainedly to the beloved one, with no thought beyond itself and its craving for an answering love.

What man could resist such wooing? Donald's heart was drawn up out of the depths of his cold nature, and he recklessly abandoned himself to the impulse of the moment. He took the beautiful woman in his arms, and kissed her passionately.

"My love! my beautiful lotus-flower! you shall never leave me."

With a sigh of happy contentment, she wound her soft, bare arms round his neck, and let her lips linger on his.

Thus it came about that Donald Anderson, the clear-sighted, deliberate Scotchman, did a thing which, had he contemplated it in his early days of acquaintance with the country, would have filled him with horror.

He married one of India's daughters.

CHAPTER III.

A CRAFTY WOMAN.

"Gold, yellow gold, 'tis that makes the man,
Each for himself, let him get it who can;
To thrive and grow rich, 'tis the surest plan—
Aye—but at death what shall it be?
Everything is vanity."—*Old Refrain.*

DONALD and his wife were very happy. No jealousy of her husband or of his profession marred her life. No demands on his time or attention troubled him. She did not ask to be dressed in European clothes, nor to gather the people of the station round her. She was contented to be mistress in her own domain, and to enjoy the luxuries that wealth brought her. Donald still took his meals alone, whilst his wife lived, after the fashion of her country, in her own apartments.

By-and-by a child was born, a fair little girl with her father's golden brown hair, hazel eyes, and white skin; and with her mother's perfectly-formed features. Mrs Anderson was delighted with her beauty, and boasted that no Englishwoman could have borne her husband a fairer child.

Anderson was also pleased with his little one. But, long before it was born, he had sunk back into the usual office life; and was absorbed in the ruling passion of his existence, money-making. Wife and child were but a secondary consideration to the busy, successful merchant. He did not want to hoard the money, nor was he mean or close. On the contrary, his purse was ever open to the demands of the philanthropical. He was a munificent donor to all the local charities, and to a great many others in different parts of the Presidency. The charm was not in the possession of wealth, but in the acquiring of it.

The love of trading grew upon him. It filled his mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts. As he forgot the girl left in his charge by the zemindar, so he now stood in danger of forgetting wife and child.

But he remembered his duty so far as to ask Mr Stainer to baptise the little one. Excepting in the early days of his strange courtship, he had never troubled himself about his wife's religious opinions. Even then, he talked and she listened. Her silence deceived him into thinking that she agreed with him; and he did not take the trouble to ascertain what those opinions were.

When he married her he intended that she should become a Christian; and, in the very few moments of spare time he

allowed himself, he did his best to persuade her to fall in with his wishes. But she put him off with feminine wilfulness, and made sweet love to him, beguiling the catechism of religion into one of love.

Finding it useless to pursue the subject, he learnt to be content with her gentleness and her faithfulness as a wife; and with the vague assertion that she believed in the Great Father of All, who created the world and ruled the Universe.

When Donald told his wife that he wished the child to be christened, and that she was to take it to the Fort church to receive baptism, she listened in silence. He interpreted the silence as indifference; and never dreamt for a moment of opposition. The young mother, however, was far from indifferent. It was only her Eve-like nature and her Eastern timidity that made her adopt a delusive silence, instead of showing an open opposition. She feared lest opposition might be met and conquered by a stronger will than her own.

Anderson appointed the day and hour when the child was to be taken to the church, fully intending to go himself. But, when the time came, some urgent matter of business interfered to prevent him from carrying out his intentions. As usual, the affairs of the office were reckoned of more importance than wife and child.

When Mrs Anderson heard that he would not be able to accompany her, her eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

A daring project had entered her mind of substituting another child for her own. But her courage would have failed her in carrying it out had her husband been with her.

She had little difficulty in finding a native woman who had borne a child to one of the English soldiers, stationed at Trichinopoly. For a handsome sum, and a few trifles of jewellery, this poor little outcast was at her service. It was dressed in the beautiful robes of Donald's baby, and carried to church to receive its sister's blessing.

Had Donald gone to fulfil his duty as a father, he must have detected the fraud, for the little East Indian infant was dark and tawny, though much fairer than its black, low-caste mother.

The godparents were to be Mr Stainer and a Mr and Mrs Hamilton, old friends of the merchant, who were living in Scotland. Anderson begged Mr Stainer to find proxies for Mr and Mrs Hamilton amongst his own Christian congregation, as his wife did not wish to meet any of the Europeans of the place. Even Mrs Stainer's presence would cause her confusion.

The child's face was covered with a fine

white lace veil, which Mrs Anderson, in her ignorance, imagined would not be removed.

Before Mr Stainer took the child in his arms, he told the ayah to take off the veil and hood. He then baptised the little black-headed baby, and gave her the name of Zelma, which Donald himself had chosen.

Mr Stainer wondered much at the baby's complexion. It was far darker than its reputed mother, though many degrees lighter than its real parent, who on this occasion acted as ayah. He made no remark, but, as he gazed at Mrs Anderson, he thought that he had never seen such a lovely face. She stood unveiled before him, with an unusual flush upon her pale olive cheek, and a flashing light in her beautiful eyes, as she thus defied the minister of her husband's religion with an act of subtle deceit.

Time passed evenly by for Donald and his wife. No quarrels or bickerings disturbed their happiness. He found joy in his work, she in her daughter. He left the child entirely to her charge, and never interfered.

For a short time after the birth of the little one, Donald's wife kept up her reading, and strove to interest her husband in conversation. But finding that the thoughts of the astute man of business were frequently wandering, and that he had

no time to give to any extraneous matters, she gradually ceased trying to interest him in anything that concerned herself. She still met him in the garden after the office was closed, and the two wandered idly by the Wyaconda. But they were contentedly silent; he thinking of the next day's transactions; she of her daughter.

Little Zelma, or Ahmonee, as her mother always called her, showed signs of great beauty. She had a strong will and an active, persevering spirit, which she inherited from her father; a hot, passionate temperament, which she inherited from her mother. In the mother this emotional nature was cloaked by a gentle indolence and timidity, which softened the expression of the passions, and caused them to find vent in little covert acts of ill-temper.

In the child, the mother's emotional nature was linked with the father's active mind and strong will. These gave her force and courage. No sooner did the storm of emotion sweep unchecked through her soul, than it took expression in extravagant words and actions.

The mother used to look on in placid amusement at such exhibitions. She saw no harm in them, even when the little one lay back upon her pillows, exhausted with the effort.

Anderson had never seen one of these

outbursts. He had no notion that the child was permitted to give its passion such rein unchecked.

One day his eyes were opened, and he received a great shock; he became suddenly aware of the fact that his daughter, who bore his name, was being brought up in the traditional way of the country, rather than after the manner of his own people.

When the child was about eight years old, he went one morning into his wife's room, to tell her that he was called to Madura, a large rich town some eighty miles farther south; and must start immediately. While he spoke he heard the voice of his little daughter raised in angry altercation with a native servant. He paused in his speech and moved into the pillared verandah. He saw her below, pursuing a horse-keeper down the garden path with a stick in her hand, furious with impotent rage. Finding that she could not overtake him, she flung herself on the ground in a paroxysm of wrath, and rolled, screaming, from side to side.

Donald was greatly distressed. He ordered a servant to fetch the child and bring her in. Then he returned to his wife, and expressed his regret at such a scene. She only smiled, and murmured something about its being of no consequence.

"But it is of great consequence," said

Donald. "The child must not be allowed to give way to passion in that manner."

"I cannot help it; she will not obey me when I speak," replied the mother indifferently.

"Then we must send her to England; this life will ruin her. I will take her home myself immediately after my return from Madura."

This was said with a decision which his wife knew by experience would be unalterable. She was startled. Part with her child, the light of her life! Never! She burst into tears—the first tears Donald had ever caused her to shed.

At this moment the child entered, flushed with anger, and looking a surpassingly beautiful little savage. Her costly China silk frock was stained with red dust. Her luxuriant locks were dishevelled, and shone with every tint of burnished gold. Her large hazel eyes, brightened with tears of anger, had something of the untamed tiger in them, as she glanced round defiantly at servants and parents alike.

"My little Zelma! you must not lose your temper in this way. I must take you to England, for it is high time you went to school and learnt to control yourself."

Donald spoke very gently but firmly. The enraged child looked at him, and then at her weeping mother, and seemed to scent

danger. She stood for one moment catching her breath, and then poured out the vials of her wrath upon her father. She upbraided him with cruelty to her mother; she waxed louder and shriller each moment, and at last fell back upon her mother's tongue. In this, which came more easily to her childish lips, she abused him in the manner which natives adopt towards each other. She vilified his relatives and his ancestors to the third and fourth generation. When words failed her, she set upon him with her fists and teeth, scratching and biting like a wounded jungle cat.

Donald turned and left the room inexpressibly shocked. It was useless to stop and talk with a weeping woman and a screaming child. If any thought of indecision had arisen in his mind at the sight of his wife's tears, it was effectually put to flight by the exhibition of the child's passion.

He wrote at once to secure passages for himself and his daughter in the next ship sailing from Madras; and he saw Mrs Stainer that very day about a school, before he started on his business quest to Madura.

On his return, the child's clothes were packed; and in two days father and daughter were on their way to Madras. The mother's grief, and Ahmonee's wrath,

were of no avail. It was a painful scene, and one which Donald hoped he should never witness again, when he carried the struggling child from the fainting mother.

Zelma's grief spent itself rapidly. The excitement and wonders of the journey served to distract her mind. By the time Colombo was reached, she was a happy little girl again; although there were times when her trouble came back to her, and she wept for the absent mother.

With Donald's wife it was different. She could not rise above her sorrow, or regard it with resignation, or even sensible endurance. She gave way to childish grief, and sank into a spiritless indolent life. By-and-by the fits of weeping grew less, and she tried to take up her reading again, but, after neglecting her books for eight years, she no longer found solace in them. The habit of concentrating her thoughts was gone, and she threw the books aside with impatience. Now and then a familiar sound would bring back the memory of her child, and once more the bitter tears of the bereaved mother would spring forth.

One day she was listlessly gazing out of an upper window, from which she had a view of the road. A procession was passing down it, a party of heathens on their way to the big temple at Srirungam, beyond Trichinopoly. The regular and melancholy

beat of the tom-toms fell on her ear, and the wail of the prolonged note of the horn attracted her attention. It swept over her soul, touching a chord that had long been silent. It brought back her childhood, when, dressed in jewels and wreaths of flowers, she used to go with her mother to the temple. She thought of the Brahmins, and all their strange mysterious rites; she thought of the terrible idol, so jealously guarded in the darkened centre room of the temple; she saw again the dim lamps burning before it, and smelt the pungent incense, and the burning camphor wafted by the silent-footed Brahmins; she heard the tinkling bells of the elephant, as he slowly and majestically returned from the river, bearing a vessel of sacred water for the use of the god. And, as she thought of the old familiar scenes, a longing entered her soul to see them all again, and take part in them.

The thought grew till it absorbed her whole mind, and finally roused her into action. The handsome 'brougham' was ordered out, with its well-appointed horses; and Donald Anderson's wife, the woman whom he had honoured with marriage, and who was the mother of his daughter, went on a mission of idolatry, to worship the carved images of her forefathers. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes grew luminous with enthusiasm, as she stepped from her carriage

before a crowd of sympathetic countrymen and women; they bowed low before her, and salaamed with the obsequiousness of their race. With slow and dignified mien she entered the temple, laden with her gifts, and walked through pillared hall and open space till she reached the door of the Moolasthanum, the inner room of which held the image.

She was not permitted to enter that jealously guarded door, through which none but Brahmins might pass. But the ministrants of the temple were fully alive to her value as a donor to the treasury, and it answered their purpose to remember that she was of Brahmin extraction. By the payment of money and jewels, she re-established her position to a certain degree, and was admitted to several caste privileges, though she could never be fully reinstated. She was allowed to enter parts of the temple which were closed against the lower castes, and she received a warm welcome from the Brahmins.

She performed her religious duties with zealous fidelity. Every week she fed a number of caste beggars; she brought wreaths of flowers to hang upon the idol's neck; and she gave camphor, sweet incense, and perfumed oil, to burn before it on every festival.

There was another reason why the

Brahmin lady was so favourably received. One of her cousins lived at Srirungam with his mother. His father was dead, and this youth had inherited considerable wealth. He had received a liberal education in the large missionary college, established at Trichinopoly, where an English graduate of Cambridge, assisted by a staff of lecturers, native and English, taught some six hundred youths, sons of the wealthier Hindus.

Rutnam had gone through the whole course, taking every advantage of the instruction offered. He had no intention of becoming a Christian; on the contrary, he was already looking forward to the time when he should be appointed a trustee of the temple property, and exercise an influence over the temple concerns, such as his father had exercised before him.

Rutnam was much younger than his cousin; but, young as he was, he espoused her cause, and was able to assist her in carrying out the dearest wish of her heart, of becoming a devotee at Vishnu's shrine.

The comely matron, still handsome, though no longer so youthful and beautiful, had found something to fill the aching void in her heart. Like her sisters in the West, she seized upon religion, fed upon it, and gathered it to her broken heart, letting it enwrap her whole soul.

Throughout the whole of her married life, the temptation to go to the temple had never assailed her. She knew that her husband would not approve of a relapse into heathenism. Although he had not pressed her to become a Christian, he relied upon her to behave as one, in eschewing all things that appertained to idolatry. All desire to worship the gods of her ancestors had died out; nor would it ever have revived, except for this trouble which had come upon her. But now, under pressure of sorrow, it returned upon her with overwhelming strength. The education she had received, the books she had read, the occasional companionship that Donald had afforded her, melted as a vapour before the burning sun of her natural instincts, the instincts of generations of idolatrous forefathers.

It was only a few months since Anderson had left her; yet, in that time, a great change had taken place. She was no longer a mild gentle woman, beaming with happiness, whose every wish was gratified, and to whom life was one even stream of bliss. A religious fever overshadowed her; and her days were passed in feverish excitement.

When Anderson returned, she greeted him warmly, and to all appearance she seemed the same happy wife he had known

before. It was a relief to him to hear her inquire calmly after her daughter, and to see that she could listen composedly to a detailed account of the journey. Once the tears welled up into the beautiful eyes, but they were held in check, and quietly wiped away.

Donald was pleased that his wife showed so much sense and self-control. He did not guess how she had consoled herself in his absence; nor suspect, for a moment, how her whole existence was being coloured by a strong under-current of religion.

Happy in the thought that he had fulfilled his duty, he returned to the ruling passion of his life with renewed zest. Money continued to flow into his coffers; profitable investments were made; and riches accumulated for the daughter he had so lately learned to love.

For, in the absence of the mother, the child had clung to him. By her pretty loving ways, she had entwined herself round his heart during the journey; and he came back to India to toil for Zelma. His child should have a fortune befitting an Eastern princess.

With this idea firmly implanted in his mind, he was in his office from the rising to the setting of the sun. He neither knew nor cared what his wife did with the long hours of the day. He supposed she

was happy in her own way. She was but an episode in his life. When he honoured her with marriage, he believed that she was a pure, single-hearted woman —a woman of education and thought; he believed also that she would be a faithful, obedient, loving wife to the end of her days; and he rested satisfied in the thought.

He never took into consideration her birth, nor her possible susceptibility to the influences that might be exercised upon her by contact with her own people. He did not know that she had renewed her acquaintance with members of her own family; but had he known it, he would not have troubled himself about it in any way.

If she had been transplanted, and removed entirely from old associations; if she had been given a wholesome intelligent form of religion when her heart craved for solace in bereavement, she might have fulfilled Donald's estimation of her character. But under the circumstances, she fell away from his ideal. The image of the wife he loved in his quiet way remained to deceive him; but a new creature was being formed with a new character; and, in this new character, she was destined to exercise a greater influence over her daughter by-and-by, than she had ever exercised before.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHOOL.

"This life of ours is a wild æolian harp of many a joyous strain,
But under them all there runs a loud perpetual wail as of souls in pain."—LONGFELLOW.

"YOU see that girl over there? Her mother is an Indian princess; her father is a very rich merchant," said one of the girls at Miss Benson's School at Kensington to a new-comer.

"What! that beautiful girl writing at the window?" was the reply.

"Yes; her name is Zelma Anderson, but she prefers to be called Ahmonee. It is her mother's pet name for her, and an Indian one of course."

The new girl stared hard at Donald's daughter.

"She is not black, nor brown, nor even yellow!" she exclaimed. "I thought all Indians were very dark."

"On the contrary, Zelma is beautifully fair. Her skin is of the palest cream colour,

and her cheeks the most delicate crimson, like Millais' beautiful women. Her mother is neither black nor brown. Judging by a picture which Zelma has of her, she is just like some lovely, dark-eyed Italian, dressed in Indian fashion. But, come along, and I will introduce you to our princess ; of course she is a princess, if her mother is one."

The two girls walked up to Miss Anderson.

"Zelma, here's a new girl," said Minnie Beaumont, with true school-girl bluntness.

The new-comer blushed, as Zelma, laying down her pen for a moment, looked up. The new girl had no especial eye for beauty ; she was apt to confuse it with merit. "Handsome is, who handsome does," was her chief guide. But Zelma's beauty was rare and transcendent. It commanded admiration from everyone—man, woman, or child. She had fulfilled the promise of her childhood; no one ventured to qualify her loveliness by saying that she was only pretty, or good-looking. The unanimous verdict was, "beautiful beyond compare."

The new girl was so much struck, that she gazed at Zelma with dumb admiration. When she at last found her tongue, she said awkwardly and inquisitively,—

"Minnie says your mother is a princess ; is she ?"

Zelma frowned ; she did not like to hear

her mother alluded to as a curiosity. She replied impatiently,—

"No, of course not. She is an Indian lady, and a very clever woman too. My father is a Scotch merchant; now you know all about me."

"Oh!" said the awkward squad, open mouthed and open eyed.

Minnie was anxious to show off the lion of the establishment, and make an impression. She said,—

"Zelma is going to India next month. She has been at school ten years, and has never seen her parents all that time."

"You won't know them again," burst in the other, becoming more and more interested.

"Oh, yes, she will," said Minnie, her blue eyes twinkling with fun. "Her mother will come to meet her in her royal robes, just like a princess. Perhaps she will wear a crown upon her head. She will dress Zelma in royal robes too, and crown her like herself."

Zelma had been embarrassed from the very beginning. The conversation was too personal, and the inquisitive gaze irritated her. Her eyes flashed angrily.

"Minnie, you are talking great nonsense; I am very busy; I wish you would go, and leave me to get on with my work."

"Now, she is getting angry," said the

incorrigible Minnie. "Come away before the tropical thunderstorm bursts."

She dragged her companion unceremoniously by the arm.

"Come and see the pianos in the music-room; I will show you which is the easiest to play upon. Zelma has a temper. It is much better than it used to be; but, when she first came, she used to have diabolical fits of rage."

The new girl looked horrified at the expression "diabolical;" and Minnie laughed with delight at the sensation she was creating.

"Yes; she used to throw herself about, and scream such strange language at Miss Benson. Gradually she grew out of it, and learnt how to control herself. The temper is all there, you know, but now she can keep it in. I should be very sorry to rouse her to the utmost."

"Minnie Beaumont, you are wanted by Miss Benson, in her room," said one of the governesses, coming up to her.

"Goodness gracious me!" exclaimed Minnie, clasping her hands in mock terror. She was still acting for the benefit of the girl, whom she was lionising. So long as that store of innocent wonder lasted, she must draw upon it, till the cup was drained to the dregs. "Now, let me think. What sins have I committed? What am I in for? Ah! it is those sausages."

"What sausages?" asked the new girl, looking aghast at the prospect of a school-fellow in disgrace.

"The other night, after we were in bed, I smelt the smell of sausages. It came from the lower regions. I crept out of bed, and following my nose, in more senses than one, arrived at the kitchen door. Miss Benson was going to have a supper-party, with—Oh! doesn't it make your mouth water? —sausages and mashed potatoes for supper. Cook was nowhere to be seen; and in a moment I slipped into the kitchen, caught up the frying-pan, and fled back to my room. I should have liked to have seen cook's face when she missed the sausages." Minnie broke into a merry laugh.

"Well?" said the other without a smile. There seemed to her inexperienced mind more danger than fun in stealing the lady principal's supper.

"Cook could not imagine where the sausages were gone, and, like me, followed her nose. I am sorry to say she sniffed her way, like a dog after a beef-bone, straight to my room, where she found the pan on the boot-rack. I pretended to be asleep; so did the other girls, who were nearly dying with laughter. Cook was so angry, and vowed she would tell; but as this happened six days ago, I hoped the old thing had got over it. My dear," said

Minnie solemnly to her astonished friend, "if ever you steal sausages, steal them *raw;* they don't smell till they are cooked." And with another hearty laugh she ran off to face whatever an adverse fate might have in store for her.

She entered Miss Benson's room sedately enough. The lady principal smiled at her, and the girl gave a sigh of relief.

"At any rate it is not the sausages," was her inward thought.

"Minnie, I have some wonderful news for you. You are to go out to India to live with your uncle and aunt, Colonel and Mrs Beaumont. It will be rather better than earning your own living as a governess, won't it, dear? I am so glad you are to have a home," said the kind-hearted woman. "I know too well what it is to stand alone in the world to wish any of my pupils the same fate."

"Oh, Miss Benson, how kind of Uncle George! Oh, I am so pleased!" And Minnie's sunny eyes were moist at the thought of a great and unexpected happiness.

Miss Benson smiled, and said,—

"You must repay them with plenty of love. They have no children of their own, and you must be as a daughter to them."

"When am I to go, Miss Benson?" asked Minnie.

"I am afraid I must part with you almost

immediately. Colonel Beaumont wants you to go out to him by the P. and O. steamship *Bombay* that leaves next month. You and Zelma Anderson are to be sent under the care of Mrs Stainer, the missionary's wife. It will be very pleasant for you to travel together. I shall have a busy time getting your outfits, and packing for you. Now, my dear, go back to the schoolroom, as I am very busy."

But Minnie was not so easily dismissed.

"You have not told me yet where Uncle George is living. He was going to move to a new station with the regiment the last time Aunt Mary wrote," said Minnie.

"Colonel and Mrs Beaumont are quartered at Trichinopoly, where Zelma's father lives, so I hope the friendship between you and her will not be broken, but that you will continue good friends when you reach your respective homes."

Miss Benson was a busy woman, and had no time to chat, so Minnie was sent off to tell her schoolfellows the joyful news.

Once out of the room her natural high spirits broke their bonds. She went in search of Zelma, and, having found her, caught her by the waist. In the maddest fit of joy, she twirled her round the room. Zelma struggled in vain to free herself from the lunatic, who seemed to have taken forcible possession of her.

"Hurrah! hurrah! I am so glad! Oh, I am so glad!" cried Minnie.

Three or four of the other girls came forward; taking hold of the exuberant girl, they disentangled her, and pushed her forcibly into a chair.

"Now, Miss Minnie, perhaps you will kindly collect the brains in that crazy head of yours, and tell us wherefore these antics."

"Oh! girls! girls! will you believe it? I am to go to India with Zelma. My uncle has sent for me, and I shall have no governessing to do. I am to live with Uncle George till I marry a rich rajah;" and she made a futile attempt to bound off her chair where she was still held down. She felt as if she could only work off her joy by another war-dance.

The four held on firmly. They had not yet satisfied their curiosity.

"You go to India! you! a mad hatter like you! It is monstrous! Why are we not asked to go instead?" they chorused, in mock-envious tones. "What will you sell your birthright for? What will you take to let me go instead? Are you sure you are telling the truth?"

"It is true, upon my honour. Oh! do let me get up and dance, or I shall die from suppressed excitement," said Minnie.

"Promise you won't assault any of us, or attack Zelma again."

"I promise! I promise! Let me go." She wriggled and writhed till she was free to rush away and spread the joyful news of her future amongst the other girls.

"Just fancy taking that madcap Minnie out with you," said a girl.

"She will be a very pleasant companion," replied Zelma, quietly, without any enthusiasm.

"You do not take your own emancipation and departure so joyfully. Perhaps you are sorry to go?"

Her questioner looked curiously into her face.

"I am sorry to leave all of you; but, on the other hand, I am glad to go back to my father."

"You will be glad to see your mother too, will you not?"

She answered this question somewhat reluctantly.

"Of course I shall be glad to see her; but I feel as if I belonged to my father and his country, and that my mother is a foreigner. I am British by education, and not Indian."

"You will feel Indian when you get to India; and you will forget your father's country and your English friends."

"Never!" said Zelma.

"And you will marry some handsome dark prince, who will load you with jewels,

and you will forget all about the commonplace English youths," continued the girl, who loved to see the beautiful Zelma flash out of her torpidity into emotional life.

"Never!" again she cried. "I love England; some day I will love an Englishman as Englishman was never loved before."

The large eyes softened; the curved lips usually set and firm, like those of a statue, parted and trembled with enthusiasm, and a rosy flush crept over the perfect face. Her companion looked at her critically.

"Yes; you have a capacity for loving and hating. You are just the sort of girl to die for a man, or break his heart if the poor fellow did not come up to your expectations. However, you will be able to take your choice, for most men will fall in love with you. As for me, I shall consider myself lucky if one individual, worthy of the name of man, falls in love with my ordinary face. I shall say 'yes' to the first, and not risk the finding of a second. Now, you will have to say 'no' twenty times before you meet the right person."

School-girls are shrewd observers, and read one another's characters very accurately. Zelma, with her beautiful face, would undoubtedly have her choice of lovers. But it would be no ordinary man who would be able to strike the chord of her strange heart, and awake a slumbering echo.

CHAPTER V.

STRONG PREJUDICES.

"Experience teaches slowly, and at the cost of mistakes."—FROUDE.

"The great obstacle to progress is prejudice."—BOVEE.

A BUSY time was passed in buying the outfits of the two girls. Miss Benson had enough to do to restrain the enthusiastic Minnie, and to rouse the reserved Zelma. After ten years of school discipline, Zelma had learned self-control and self-repression. She had also learned to hide her feelings from the searching eye of the little school-world in which she lived. She was extremely sensitive, and shrank from the rough touch of the blunderer, who ruthlessly treads on the finer feelings of others.

At first she sought for congenial friends amongst her companions, and opened out her heart freely, displaying, as she did so, a wealth of beautiful original thought. But her schoolfellows could not understand her, nor follow the workings of her mind. She

fathomed their lukewarm, colourless characters with quick instinct; and, finding them come so far short of what she expected, she closed her own heart, fearful lest unsympathetic eyes should see the tropical treasures it held.

She was also susceptible to the chilly climate of England, so different from the burning languid heat of her Indian home. The fogs wrapped her in a cold sheet, and chilled her deepest feelings into torpidity. Once or twice she had been made aware of the latent warmth of her heart, but it had frightened her. She did not recognise herself for the moment; she found that she was different from her schoolfellows, and absurd in their eyes; and it caused her to bury her emotions deep in her own heart, where she covered them with the cold heavy stone of English common-sense and propriety.

She never forgot a certain evening when she was just fifteen years old.

It was a warm night in summer, and the air was hot and close. A full moon looked in at the window of the big bedroom where she slept, making a square patch of light on the white boarded floor. Tossing and restless, she wooed sleep in vain. Her brain was on fire with the awakening of her soul within her. Her heaving breast was filled with new and strange longings. She felt suffocated within the four walls, and

ardently desired to escape; to throw off all fettering proprieties; to get away from the petty discipline of the school; to fly beyond the galling atmosphere of supervision and criticism, which now enveloped her. Impelled by she knew not what, she got up and softly opened the window. The country was flooded with subdued light. Gazing at the full round orb of night, Zelma was suddenly overwhelmed with a great wave of memory. She saw the palm-trees of her Eastern home; the fire-flies dancing in the frond-like leaves; she seemed to hear the quaint melancholy wail of the sitar that her mother played; the distant beat of the tom-tom, which has such a musical charm for the Oriental ear. She fancied she could smell the waxen blossoms of the pagoda-tree that used to grow beneath her bedroom window, and waft their heavy scent on the night air.

As she thought of all these things, her eyes grew luminous, her lips parted, and she was like a transformed being.

One of the girls, disturbed by the opening of the window, and fearful for the honour of the dormitory, got up from her bed; she came to Zelma's side and looked into her face, thinking that perhaps the child was walking in her sleep. She was startled by what she saw.

"Zelma, what is the matter? what are

you doing here? You look as if you were going to have a fit. Come to bed, do."

She dragged her away from the window, closed the lower sash, and opened the top.

The next day all the girls were laughing at Zelma about her moonstruck fit, as they called it. The poor girl felt that, somehow, she had been caught in a ridiculous situation. She was ashamed of herself, ashamed of being found so susceptible to the influences of nature.

"If she had been looking for her lover, I could quite understand it," said the girl who had found her. "But to stand there, staring out into the night, star-gazing, in that idiotic fashion, was ridiculous, and also risky for the reputation of the dormitory."

Thus it was that she had been trained to hide the jewels of her heart, and to present a decorous sober exterior, when that heart was often burning with emotion. This acquired self-control and repression, combined with her natural beauty, gave her a reserved dignity which repelled all familiarity.

Miss Benson was fully aware of the character she had formed in her pupil, though, perhaps, even she, with all her observation, hardly fathomed the depth of her emotional nature.

"It is better that she should be self-

contained, and able to act on her own responsibility, considering what her mother is, than that she should be blown hither and thither by every breath of ill-regulated sentiment. Yes, I think that I have done my duty by Mr Anderson's daughter. I hope that he will find her all he desires," she said to herself as she watched the girl.

Miss Benson was now no longer the schoolmistress, but the friend. She would like to have seen a little more emotion in Zelma; a little regret at leaving a house which had been her home for so many years; a little anticipation of pleasure in the coming meeting with her parents. She would like to have seen signs of some girlish delight in the choice of new dresses, and in the buying of the innumerable little prettinesses that go to complete a girl's outfit for India.

Zelma's outfit was enough to charm the heart of any maiden. No money was spared, and Miss Benson found it difficult to spend it all judiciously without absolute waste. Minnie's outfit was a much smaller and more humble affair, although the girl in her simplicity thought it charming. It cost just one-tenth the amount that was spent over Zelma's; yet the merry-hearted Minnie was enthusiastic about it, and showed unbounded delight.

Miss Benson looked at Zelma now and then a little anxiously. She hoped she

had not overdone the careful training, and crushed all the warm life out of the hot-house flower that had been confided to her charge.

But Zelma's heart was not dead. She felt a great deal more than she dared to show. She was sorry to leave the home of her girlhood and her companions. She was grateful to Miss Benson for all her kindness, and she was not indifferent to the elaborate and costly outfit. But she could not express what she felt; she dared not give the rein to her feelings, lest they should get beyond her control, and bring her under the ridicule of her schoolfellows. She took refuge in her usual dignified reserve, and consequently gave Miss Benson the impression that she was callous and indifferent to all alike.

She took the girls to the docks, and saw them safely on board the big ship that was to be their home for the next four weeks.

Mrs Stainer was there already, a dear, fussy, kind-hearted woman, whose capacity for loving and befriending was great.

"I am so glad to have you girls with me," she said, in warm welcome; "I should be so lonely on the journey with no one to look after."

Miss Benson smiled.

"You will have your hands full with Minnie, I fancy; but Zelma can take care

of herself. My giddy little Minnie will be first and foremost wherever there is any fun or frivolity."

"Oh, Miss Benson, what a character you give me! Of course, I must join in all the fun. What is life for, but to laugh and be merry in?" said Minnie.

"That's right, child; laugh whilst you can," replied Mrs Stainer sympathetically.

Zelma did not join in the conversation, and Mrs Stainer looked at her curiously. The girl's eyes were fixed on the Lascars, who were busy with the ropes, luggage, and cargo. The sight of them moved her strangely. It was the first touch of her native land; though she could not analyse her feelings, she was stirred within her soul by the mere sight of their brown faces. She did not hear what was being said around her, but watched, with fascinated gaze, the strange figures, which seemed as though they had come out of the dim past. They moved before her as in a dream, which would fade away presently from her sight.

Mrs Stainer let her be; she guessed what was in the mind of the girl, and she chatted on till the moment came for parting.

Farewells were spoken, and the ship was cleared of all visitors. The passengers went into their cabins, some to weep, some to make themselves as comfortable as they could in the small space allotted to them

for bed and dressing-room. The big vessel awoke out of its sleep, and began to throb with life. The screw slowly beat upon the dirty Thames water, and churned it into a pale-brown froth. Those who had never left old England before, felt a sudden spasm at the heart, as they realised that the moment had come which was to take them away from home and country. Those who were old travellers settled down with a sigh of resignation to the tedious journey that was before them.

Mrs Stainer went to the girls' cabin, and helped them with her past experience in arranging and unpacking. She told them the hours of meals, described the new mode of life they were entering upon, and chatted comfortably and pleasantly until the strangeness of their surroundings had somewhat worn off. She met with a hearty response from Minnie, who had been tearful and affectionate with Miss Benson at the last. Her tears were but April showers; she was now laughing and chattering, full of excitement at having begun the voyage.

"There's the dressing-bell," said Mrs Stainer; "I must go and dress. If you are quick, we shall have time to take a little walk on deck before dinner."

"She trotted off to her cabin, which she shared with a Miss Seton, a lady of her own age, who was travelling for her health,

and had never left England before. In a quarter of an hour she returned, and found Minnie ready.

"Zelma would prefer to stay here till dinner," said Minnie.

"Very well, we will look in and call for her when the bell rings."

Away went the two up the companion-stairs, Minnie all eagerness to see who her fellow-passengers were, and Mrs Stainer not sorry to get a little fresh air.

A good many people were lounging on deck; groups of men talking; solitary individuals leaning over the taffrail, looking down into the dirty Thames water, or at the flat marshy shores on each side; ladies in couples walking or sitting about, wrapped in shawls; all were more or less observant of each other. There were about a hundred and fifty passengers on board, and it was but natural that there should be a little curiosity amongst them concerning each other, since they were destined to live together as one family for a month of enforced idleness in tolerable intimacy.

When the dinner-bell rang, the passengers on deck filed down the companion-stairs, with appetites unimpaired at present by the restless ocean. Mrs Stainer called for Zelma, as she had promised, and the three went in with the crowd.

The saloon was set out with one long

table down the centre, and several smaller tables on each side. It was at one of these last that Mrs Stainer, Zelma, and Minnie found themselves seated, together with two German missionaries, a newly-married couple, and Miss Seton. It was not a very lively meal. Zelma was reserved and silent as usual; Minnie was occupied in gazing curiously around; whilst the two elder ladies were tired with the excitement and bustle of the day.

Very soon after dinner Minnie and Zelma went to their cabin, and, before long, early as it yet was in the night, the two girls were fast asleep.

The next morning broke grey and dull. The *Bombay* was ploughing a leaden sea, and there was considerable motion. Zelma awoke first, and, jumping out of her berth, was preparing to dress, when she was assailed with those horrible qualms which are the forerunners of sea-sickness. Her head was like lead, and she was overcome with a giddiness, which sent her back to her berth at once. This was but the beginning of many a weary hour, for she proved a bad sailor.

Minnie, on the contrary, was not affected by the rolling of the ship in the least. Beyond a frantic desire to clutch wildly at everything within reach, she seemed as well and as happy as ashore.

When Mrs Stainer, who was also a good sailor, came to see how her young friends were getting on, she found Minnie dressed and taking her cup of tea as happily as possible, whilst poor Zelma was looking utterly miserable.

After ministering to Zelma's need, Mrs Stainer carried Minnie off for a blow of fresh air on deck. The rolling and pitching of the ship increased every moment; the salt water dashed off the gleaming black hull in clouds of spray. The air was delicious; nothing could have been more enjoyable for people who were good sailors than the morning walk.

Minnie's spirits rose, and a fresh colour came into her cheeks with the unwonted exertion of trying to maintain her equilibrium. At one moment she seemed to be climbing a steep hill; at another she was plunging head-foremost down an inclined plane, slippery with the moisture of the morning's holystoning. The ship lurched sideways, and Mrs Stainer planted herself firmly where she was; Minnie was shot straight into the back of a gentleman, who was standing by the taffrail, looking into the seething water.

"Oh! I am so sorry! I did not mean to come here at all. I beg your pardon," she gasped, her blue eyes twinkling with fun.

As she spoke, the ship rolled over on to

the other side; she lost her balance, and clutched wildly at her new friend with fresh apologies. With much amusement he grasped her firmly, holding her safely against the rail.

"Let me give you an arm," he said, "and you will find it much easier to walk."

Minnie hesitated for a moment, as the question of the propriety of walking with a stranger crossed her mind. But, the rolling motion recommencing, she grasped his arm in self-preservation, and, smiling at Mrs Stainer, she continued her morning walk with her new cavalier.

At the ringing of the breakfast bell the two went down to the saloon together. A steward came forward and directed them to their seats. The tables were rearranged, and Minnie was not sorry to find that she and her companion were to sit at one of the small tables. Mrs Stainer and Miss Seton were there already. The table held eight; four of the seats were vacant.

"Four poor souls absent," observed the young man, with a smile.

"Yes; and one of them is a friend of ours," said Minnie.

"Indeed; your sister?"

"My schoolfellow. I have no sister," replied Minnie.

"What a good sailor you are, Miss Beaumont."

Minnie looked up sharply.

"How did you know my name?" she asked.

Her companion smiled.

"Do you not see you are labelled? Here is the card with your name, that was laid in front of your seat"—it had escaped Minnie's notice—"and here is mine."

Minnie read, "Mr Percy Bell."

"I am returning to India, after a pleasant holiday at home. I think I must have met your husband, Mrs Stainer, some years ago in the South."

Mrs Stainer instantly plunged into reminiscences, and was charmed to find that she and Mr Bell had many mutual acquaintances. By the end of breakfast, the little party were on a very friendly footing.

After breakfast Minnie went to see Zelma, who was still feeling very wretched, and unable to hold up her head.

The rolling of the ship continued all that day, and the Captain prophesied that it would be still worse when they entered the Bay. Fortunately it did not affect Minnie, who appeared at all the meals, and did justice to the excellent fare provided.

In the evening, after dinner, Mr Bell asked her to take another walk on deck. It was quite dark, except for the dim light shed by the lamps, which were hung about the deck. The night wind blew keenly and

sharply off the sea, and occasionally a dash of cold spray splashed on to the deck. The sea seethed, and boiled, and hissed, as the *Bombay* cut through the waves, whilst the wind roared in the rigging.

"You look quite alarmed at the prospect, Miss Beaumont," said Percy, with a smile.

He was a rapid reader of human nature, and it was not difficult to detect in her manner hesitation and a little alarm; he continued,—

"The sea is doing nothing unusual for this time of the year. We do not even call this stormy. And you are doing nothing unusual in taking a walk with me. Put your hand on my arm with a firm grasp, and let us see if you have acquired what the sailors call your sea-legs."

Minnie laughed; her mind had been accurately read, and her doubts answered.

"What a wonderful reader of thought you are, Mr Bell; I shall be afraid to come under your observation if I have any secrets to keep from you."

"Our work in India is calculated to teach us to read human nature. The tongue of the native is the last thing about him that speaks the truth."

"What have you to do with the natives?" asked Minnie.

"I help to govern them, being in the Civil Service. I act as magistrate and try

cases; I assess the taxes on the crops, and decide all disputes as to boundaries and rights of irrigation in my district. I read and listen to petitions; and, in fact, am always working for the general welfare of the Indian community. Very often I pass long mornings listening to conflicting evidence on some disputed point."

"I suppose they do not always speak the truth?"

"Their tongues do not; but whilst they lie so glibly, I read the truth in other signs."

"How?" asked Minnie, thoroughly interested.

"I watch their hands and their feet. The fingers and toes of a native are full of expression, and in constant sympathy with his thoughts. They work loosely and nervously if a man is lying; but when he is earnestly telling the truth, they are firm and often clenched. However, there is no rule as to their mode of expression; but I see enough to guide me in my search for truth; I think I understand them as well as most men in my position, if not better."

"You find them an interesting people?" queried Minnie.

"I do; they are extremely interesting to all who deal intelligently with them."

"And you must love the people you help to rule?"

Percy Bell paused before replying.

"Will you think badly of me if I confess that I feel an unconquerable repugnance towards the whole race? They are so wholly wanting in nobility of character, in that chivalrous honour which entered so largely into the English nation when it was being formed. I do not blame them for their feeble, nerveless character. It is but the result of generations of feebleness and nervelessness. But I love my work, and I am greatly interested in the people. I can even sympathise with them and pity them, because I have Oriental blood in my own veins, although I am an Englishman. My grandmother was from Roumania.

"Then you would not mind marrying one of the nation you help to govern?" said Minnie.

"Good heavens! What put such an idea into your head? Marry a native woman! certainly not!"

There was such unmistakable surprise and horror in his tone, that Minnie was startled.

"I hope I have not offended you by speaking so personally," she said, glancing up into his face in the dim light shed by the lamps. Her loving little heart shrank from wounding the feelings of others.

"Not at all," replied Percy, in his natural tones again. "But when you know the country as well as I do, you will better understand how preposterous your question is.

"But are you sure that it is so preposterous? I know a gentleman who has married an Indian lady, and he is very happy."

Percy looked incredulous, and was silent. Minnie continued,—

"I assure you that I am telling you a fact. The daughter of that gentleman and his native wife is with us now, on her way to her father's house."

"Do you mean to say that Mrs Stainer is taking out a half-caste girl with you?" he asked bluntly.

"Yes; and what is more, she has been my friend for the last ten years; we were at school together."

Percy was again silent.

"You seem surprised," continued Minnie. She was nettled at his tone, and at his evident disapproval.

"I am surprised, because, as a rule, the daughters of native women do not find intimate associates in the daughters of Englishmen and women."

"But Zelma is just like an English girl," persisted Minnie.

"Perhaps, to your inexperienced eyes," murmured the incredulous young man.

"And what is more, she is very beautiful and clever."

"Possibly; but she will nevertheless have all the failings of her race, which no amount

of education can eradicate. I suppose you admire her dark-skinned beauty and black velvet eyes immensely?"

"She is not dark, nor black-eyed, and I am quite sure that, when you see her, you will agree with me in thinking her lovely."

"I am quite sure that I shall fall far short of your expectations. I will try to admire your Cleopatra a little for your sake; but please remember we are hardly accountable for all our likes and dislikes. Some prefer dark eyes; some blue. Now, I like blue eyes best," and Mr Percy Bell looked into his companion's sapphire eyes with a bold, friendly admiration. He did not intend to fall out with so pleasant a comrade, or quarrel with her over an unknown absent friend. "We will let your East Indian friend alone, and I promise to admire her at a distance, though she is touched with the tar-brush. You, on your part, must promise to be kind and friendly."

"It is a bargain," cried Minnie, laughing.

A few steps farther brought them to Mrs Stainer, who had found a snug corner under the lee of the music-room.

"Here is Mrs Stainer. I will leave you under her wing, as I promised to take a hand at whist in the smoking-room."

Minnie sat down in her sweet, dutiful way; she had a natural aptitude for doing as she was bid. Mrs Stainer was chatting

with Miss Seton, and they did not break the thread of their conversation as the girl took her place by them.

Left to herself, Minnie became more thoughtful than usual. What was this strange thing about Zelma? Zelma the beautiful, the wealthy, the talented. Surely Mr Bell had held her up as an inferior creature on account of that very birth which had always thrown a flavour of romance over her. The fact of her being the daughter of an Indian Princess—as the girls chose to believe her mother—raised her out of the sea of commonplace, and enveloped her in mystery. Minnie and her schoolfellows had often envied her her birth, her riches, her foreign mother, and her strange, Indian home. Here was a man who knew the world, and who was a keen reader of human nature, holding Zelma up to pity and contempt. She could not believe that he was correct; and yet she recognised already his superior judgment. She longed for the moment when Zelma should be well enough to get up, and come amongst them. She would then stand on her own merits, unassisted by the praises of her friend, "and we should see." Minnie put her lips together, and nodded her head wisely, as though she knew that there was a surprise in store for self-opiniated Mr Percy Bell.

CHAPTER VI.

A LUXURIOUS NATURE.

"In my remembrance blossom,
The images long forsaken."—HEINE.

PERCY BELL was a fine, strong young man, whose appearance did not suggest a ten years' residence in India. The climate had howled around him in heat, and dust, and enervating moisture by turns, like an ill-favoured jackal; but it had howled in vain. Percy's well-knit frame and vigorous constitution resisted all its attacks. He possessed the amiability and energy of health; went at his work with a will; and showed a remarkably clear head and correct judgment in adjudicating for the people. The Governor of Madras had already noticed the young man's capabilities; he was likely in time to come to the fore through his own merit, if he chose to continue his career as he had begun it.

Percy was taking his usual walk before breakfast. He was not exactly watching for his little companion of last night, but, if

she had appeared, he would not have failed to see her, and secure her as a partner in his morning's perambulations.

But Minnie was nowhere to be seen. She was with Zelma. The motion of the vessel was still considerable, and the sea would not be quieter till the bay was passed.

Zelma made an attempt to get up, but the stewardess had only just time to re-arrange her berth when the poor girl had to lie down again. The violent sickness had abated, but her head and eyes throbbed with pain, and the whole frame was exhausted.

Minnie, finding Zelma was able to listen to her chat, stayed to amuse her with news, as she called it, of what they were all doing.

"We sit at one of the side tables, and the gentleman next me is a Mr Bell. He is a Madras civilian, and says that we shall most likely meet again in India; he expects to be posted to the Trichinopoly district as acting collector. The honeymoon people have gone over to the other side of the saloon, and the missionaries too. The ship's doctor should sit at the head of our table, but he has not appeared at present. How do you think I made Mr Bell's acquaintance?"

"It is impossible to guess in the case of such a madcap as you," said Zelma, with a smile.

"By throwing myself into his arms; an

excellent way of getting to know people, if you do it naturally and involuntarily."

"Of course it was both with you."

"Oh, yes; the ship just gave a lurch, and sent me head-foremost into Mr Bell. It would have been just the same if it had been a lascar; only then I should probably have knocked him over, and we should both have rolled into the scuppers."

"And now you are doubtless amusing Mr Bell with all your school chatter. You treat him, I dare say, very much as you used to treat the new girls; give him long descriptions of all your most intimate friends, and tell him their family histories," said Zelma. Minnie's chat was beginning to rouse her out of her lassitude.

"Yes; I told him all about Miss Benson's at dinner last night, and afterwards we talked about you."

"Oh! did you?" said Zelma, somewhat satirically.

"Do you know, dear, he did not seem very much impressed by my account of you?" said the candid Minnie.

"I should think not, indeed! How can a perfect stranger find any interest in an unknown woman who is sea-sick? All he could do would be to pity her."

"But he did seem interested in a way, and was surprised that you and I should be such friends."

"I cannot see any reason for surprise on his part. He was more probably surprised at hearing such confidential family histories from your wagging little tongue."

Minnie laughed, and said,—

"I shall make Mr Bell over to you when you appear on the scene, and I shall amuse myself with the doctor; for, to tell the truth, I am just a little bit afraid of Mr Bell."

"How do you and Mrs Stainer get on?" asked Zelma.

"Famously; she is a dear old soul; but she has made up her mind that I am going to flirt. She has found a companion after her own heart in Miss Seton, who has never travelled before. Mrs Stainer has taken her under her wing. At present the poor dame is receiving a series of shocks to her mental system, which will turn her grey hair quite white in time."

"What sort of shocks?" asked Zelma, willing to keep Minnie with her.

"The first was administered two nights ago, when the sea began to get rough, and our ports were closed There was a knock at the cabin door, Mrs Stainer says, and in walked the ship's carpenter, a very good-looking, if somewhat grimy, young man; he was in his shirt-sleeves, and carried a bag of tools. Without a word he proceeded to screw up the port-hole. Poor Miss Seton, who was lying in her berth, arranged with

admirable neatness in the cleanest and most ornamental of night-dresses, was almost paralysed with horror. Excepting the family physician, she had never had a man in her bedroom in her life, she confided to Mrs Stainer afterwards. She glared at him through the semi-darkness, as he stood with his back to her; when he turned to depart, she gave a little scream, and pulled the sheet over her face. Mrs Stainer wholly scandalised her by speaking to the man, and asking him if dirty weather was expected. 'How could you talk to the horrid creature, allowing him to think that we approved of his presence in our cabins?' said Miss Seton, in her primmest manner."

"Poor Miss Seton! She will have a good many more such shocks before the end of her journey, unless we have exceptionally fine weather," said Zelma.

"She will get used to them in time, and end by being more brazen-faced about the proprieties of our Indian life than any of us. Mrs Stainer says it is always so with these globe-trotting ladies; they become hardened old travellers after a time, ready to go anywhere and see anything."

The breakfast bell rang, and Minnie sprang up.

"I must go. I hope the stewardess brings you what you like; she would not let me wait upon you."

"I am well looked after, dear; you need not trouble that little head of yours about me. I hope I shall soon be able to get up, and come on deck."

In the saloon Minnie found Mrs Stainer, Miss Seton, Mr Bell, the doctor, a good-looking young Scotchman, and a lady who was going out, like Mrs Stainer, to rejoin her husband. The tables were gradually filling up as people recovered their indisposition, and got used to the sea. Zelma's place was the only one vacant at the small side-table.

"Good morning, Miss Beaumont," said Percy Bell's pleasant voice. "You did not come on deck this morning for your walk. Overslept yourself, eh?"

"Indeed, I did not," said Minnie, turning on him with mock indignation. "I stayed in the cabin to amuse Miss Anderson. This is the first morning that she has been able to talk. I think she will soon be well enough to get up; but she is not herself yet."

"Poor thing! Those kind of people always succumb to the slightest breath of misfortune," said Percy.

"You are quite wrong in your estimation of Miss Anderson's character. She has a firm will, a headstrong determination, and an energy that is worthy of her Scotch ancestors. Her father is a Scotchman. There is much more of the do-and-die temperament

about her than there is about me," said Minnie, in warm vindication of her absent friend's character.

Percy smiled at her enthusiasm, and did not like her the less for her loyalty. It amused him to watch the varying emotions that passed over the English girl's features, and to touch chords that brought certain feelings into play. Like most students of human nature, he loved to fathom and to probe. When he met with the response he expected, he experienced something of the satisfaction that fills the heart of a skilled musician, who draws his bow across the strings of his instrument with a masterly touch, and produces sounds and effects at his will.

Minnie again felt slightly irritated, as Mr Bell continued to laugh and generalise on the feebleness of the East Indian. As soon as she could, she turned to the doctor, and began to talk to him. It was an excellent commencement to the promised flirtation, and Percy Bell was obliged to fall back upon the new-comer for conversation.

Towards the middle of the day, the sun came out, and the boiling waves settled down into glistening undulations of beautiful blue. The motion of the ship distinctly lessened, and the hearts of the sea-sick began to pluck up courage.

Zelma, encouraged and assisted by the stewardess, managed to dress herself. When

Minnie came to look for her, she was surprised to find the cabin empty. She met the stewardess in the passage, who told her that Miss Anderson had gone on deck.

Running up the companion stairs, she encountered the doctor.

"You are just the person I am looking for," he exclaimed. "You told me last night that you liked music, and sang a little. Do come to the piano in the music-room and begin to play. The other ladies are so shy of making a beginning. If you sit down and rattle off a lively waltz, we shall break the ice."

The doctor had already discovered that Minnie possessed an inexhaustible supply of good nature. She went at once to the music-saloon, and deferred her search for Zelma.

In a snug little corner under the shelter of one of the boats, Zelma was comfortably reclining in her deck-chair. Mrs Stainer sat with her for a while; but, finding that the girl was listless, and disinclined to talk, she left her and went below to write letters. Zelma was not the only one who had made her appearance for the first time that morning. Some fifteen to twenty passengers were rejoicing in the sunshine, and looking around them with reviving spirits and health. As she watched the people sitting in groups, or idling about the deck, she heard the sound of the piano.

Others heard it too, and amongst them Percy Bell, who was always attracted by music. He got up and walked towards the saloon. In doing so he passed her, and looked down at her with natural curiosity, wondering who she could be. The breeze had blown a little colour into her cheeks, and Percy thought that he had never seen so beautiful a woman. Even in that momentary passing glance, he had noted the perfect features, the rare mouth, and curved lips; the large eyes, whose depths were now calm and slumberous, but which might be awakened into glorious light under the influence of the passions.

He passed on and entered the music-saloon, where a crowd had already assembled round Minnie.

"Do you sing, Mr Bell?" she asked.

On replying in the affirmative, he was sent to get his music. Others went on the same quest; and, before long, glees, duets, and solos were in full swing. The lunch bell surprised them all; but singing had made them hungry, and they trooped down, a merry party, to the dining-room. Zelma, still an invalid, had her lunch on deck.

"Miss Beaumont, I saw such a pretty girl on deck. Pretty is hardly the word; she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

Percy was one of those men who knew their own minds. His judgment was

quick, but not impulsive; when once he had formed an opinion, it was difficult to uproot it, or make him change it.

"It must have been Miss Anderson, my friend. She is on deck to-day for the first time," said Minnie.

"What! the daughter of your native lady?" Mr Bell looked incredulous.

"And why not? Have I not told you several times that Zelma is really beautiful?"

"The lady I saw is no East Indian. I think I know the class well by this time, with their heavy, regular features, and cloudy skin. Some people call them handsome; I do not. This lady must be a European, though she may not be English. She has a look of the sunny South in her."

"Perhaps she has a strain of your mother's nation in her," said Minnie.

"I am sure she is not a Roumanian, if that is what you mean. But, Miss Beaumont, it was my grandmother who was a Roumanian, not my mother. I call myself an Englishman to the backbone, for I was born in England, and brought up with all the prejudices of a true Briton."

They chatted on till lunch was over, and then Percy went to his cabin to read and write. He hated indefinite idleness; and, even on board ship, set himself to do a certain amount of work. Just now he was studying Persian. In spite of his outspoken

claim to be thought an Englishman, he was always deeply interested in all things appertaining to the East. He had long ago mastered Sanskrit, and passed the necessary examinations in Tamil, the language of the people amongst whom his work lay. He was at present eagerly dipping into Persian.

Mrs Stainer, Miss Seton, and Minnie gathered round Zelma's chair, working and talking till tea was brought. With the tea came three or four of the passengers, who had already made Minnie's acquaintance over the piano. They wanted her to join them in a game of "Bull." The board was placed on deck beyond the engine-room, and they were going to begin at once. No need to repeat the invitation, especially when Zelma and Mrs Stainer said "go."

Miss Seton yawned, and complained that such an open-air life made her sleepy; so Mrs Stainer proposed that they should both go below to lie down. Zelma did not mind being left, and preferred to stay on deck; she had grown weary of the cabin during the last few days. Indeed, she was not sorry to be by herself, for she was not a girl who depended on the constant society of others for amusement.

She watched the sparkling waves and listened to the pleasant hiss of the water as the ship sped on its way. She could hardly

realise that she was going home; yes, home to her parents, to see the land of her birth, and her mother's people. What would her mother be like? She remembered her as a kind, loving, gentle woman, always dressed in beautiful folds of soft, noiseless silk, her arms and neck loaded with heavy jewels. There was a faint, sweet odour about the silk, and a tinkle of bangles on her mother's arms and ankles, which still lingered in her memory. The sound and scent were associated with large silent rooms, darkened by curtains and cooled by the long double punkahs that swung monotonously backwards and forwards, day and night, without ceasing. She remembered her mother's caresses, the loving touch, the sweet indulgence she always met with at her hands. She recalled the face and the fond eyes that watched her every movement with a devouring, absorbing affection. Her father she only remembered as the master, of whom every one seemed to stand in awe. What would her parents be like after so long an absence? She would be a loving daughter to both. Her mother was clever; she could find companionship in her, she would go out with and visit the people around. But what people? Her mother's or her father's? When the thought first passed through her mind, she meant the English neighbours. Would she have to visit her mother's relatives, if she had any?

Zelma knew nothing of her mother's girlhood. Somehow the idea of becoming intimate with natives, on an equal footing as relatives, was not pleasant; her thoughts had run into an uncomfortable channel. She roused herself from her reclining position; and, as she did so, she knocked over the empty tea-cup in its saucer, which had been left on deck near her chair. In a moment a hand was put forward, and the cup and saucer were removed.

It was Percy Bell's; he had come up on deck, after a good two hours' study, for a little fresh air and relaxation. Zelma had an uncomfortable feeling for the moment that he had been watching her; but it passed as she looked up into his face and thanked him.

"I am lazy. I should have put my cup in a safer place, till one of the stewards fetched it; I am not used to the unsteadiness of the ship yet, so I did not venture to move," said Zelma apologetically.

Percy was nothing loth to talk to this beautiful woman.

"You surely do not feel any motion today. The ship is going almost as steadily as if she were in a mill-pond."

"I am afraid I have not yet become unconscious of the throbbing of the engines."

"If you keep up your courage, and fight against the disinclination for all exertion, which sea-sickness brings, you will soon get

over it, and be as happy as the rest," said Percy.

"I am quite prepared to fight, and feel sure that I shall give the stewardess no more trouble."

The conversation seemed about to drop, and Percy had an opportunity of withdrawing, which he did not take. On the contrary, he sat down in one of the vacant chairs by her side.

"Is this your first voyage?" he asked.

"No," was the simple but rather discouraging reply.

Finding that the topic of self did not interest her, he began another.

"I have been studying Persian since lunch. I am just beginning to read it easily, and I have been absorbed in a book of Persian poetry."

Zelma's interest was awakened at last.

"Is it like any of our English poetry?" she asked.

Percy was delighted with her question, and launched out into an animated description of what he had been reading; he gave her his own translation of little passages that had pleased him especially.

"The man who wrote it must have been a keen observer of human nature, and possessed of a most delicate sense of perception, to be able thus to analyse his own and others' feelings," said Zelma.

"I think all Oriental natures have a very acute sensibility. Their ears recognise more than double the notes in a musical scale than are detected by the European ear; their mental vision shows them subtle phases of feeling and thought, of which the blunt, practical nature of the Englishman has no conception."

A light leaped into the girl's eyes.

"Perhaps, amongst your girl friends, you have noticed a difference in delicacy of mind, and in acute perception in reading the minds of others. Some people call the faculty tact; others sympathy. I call it the gift of a wider and clearer mental vision," said Percy.

"Vision is hardly sufficient. One must be something more than aware of the emotions of others. One must feel with them and for them,—in fact, step up from the audience arena to the stage—before one can read and understand human nature as these poets have done."

"You like poetry?"

"Yes; I like it as I like fruit—now and then, and very choice; then I want to take my fill, till I am satisfied. A mere taste only arouses a longing within me."

"To continue the analogy," said Percy, with a smile, "fruit, to be appreciated, needs the accessories of the silver knife, the rare china dish, and the perfect glass of wine; the appetite should be at that deli-

cate point where hunger half sleeps. To enjoy poetry, one should have perfect scenery and climate, the comfortable luxurious seat, and be in a sympathetic mood."

"True," said Zelma. "Who, for instance, could read some of Tennyson's garden scenes with any enjoyment in a London fog? It is a wonder to me that, with such a climate, England has produced so many poets; whilst the East, with its greater age and greater number of millions, has given the world, comparatively speaking, so few."

"In the East, every man is a poet in himself, though he never commits himself to paper; he has not the power of putting his ideas into definite thought, much less language. Even the ryot, working in his rice-fields, flings himself down beneath the shade of the graceful tamarind tree, and dreams away the burning midday hours in poetic fancies of wealth and luxury.

The mention of the tamarind awoke memories in Zelma's mind. She saw the beautiful acacia-like foliage of soft green, waving above; and the dusky forms of the natives lying beneath; she heard the green parrots and the crows quarrelling in the branches, over the fruit. She felt as though some one had opened for her some favourite old book, that had long lain upon the shelf half forgotten. Never during her residence at school had she

met with any one who knew India, or could talk of it with knowledge. The conversation of a man who was intimate with the country had a new charm for her. She wondered who he was; and, being drawn a little out of her usual reserve, she asked him several questions about India.

Percy's answers delighted her; he seemed to divine just what she was burning to learn, although he did not yet understand why she thus craved to hear. As they talked, he watched her with all the pleasure which a man, with a strong predeliction for the beautiful, finds in a perfect woman or a perfect picture.

His curiosity was also aroused. Leaning back in his chair, and sitting slightly behind her, he could see her profile. What a power of determination there was in that firmly-closed mouth, and that rounded, modelled chin. What a depth of passion lay in those luminous eyes that looked out over the shining waves, searching back into memory's stores, as his words recalled certain scenes. Those delicate nostrils could quiver with scorn and anger; those shapely hands and long fingers, that rested so peacefully on her lap, could surely linger in gentle caressing touches over the head of him she loved, or imperatively signal his dismissal.

Diamonds glittered on her fingers, and scintillated as the ship slowly rocked to

and fro. They were rare and magnificent gems, which had come into her father's hands in his dealings with the natives. The girl loved their sparkling beauty, and insisted on wearing them, although Miss Benson and Mrs Stainer had each in turn remonstrated, saying that such jewels were unsuitable for a schoolgirl. They suited her beauty now, however, and Percy's fastidious taste was not offended.

The girl seemed to him a strange mixture of mental power and sensual beauty. She possessed force of mind, power of will, penetration; yet there was nothing cold or calculating about her. In such a nature, he thought, passion might rage against reason, and heart be pitted against head in a terrible struggle. The battle would be grand and royal, but the heart might bleed to death on the field of victory. Who could she be, this womanly girl? Was she really the Miss Anderson, so loyally championed by the tender-hearted little Minnie? Percy tried to find the native mother in her face, but could not. He judged only by past experience. The East Indians whom he knew were generally the offspring of the lowest, blackest, Tamulian women, and of Englishmen of low tastes, if not of low birth. The better class of East Indians were those who had intermarried amongst themselves, or

were united to English mechanics, clerks, and soldiers. Wherever he had seen dark blood it invariably came out in a dusky skin, dark, heavy-lidded eyes, thick black hair, and a full-lipped mouth. He had known East Indians who had a claim to a Cleopatra-like beauty; but he had never come across a beauty like this, a refined, tropical loveliness, that plainly bespoke a child of the South, and as plainly reflected the intellect of the North.

Percy might well be puzzled, for the union of the Scotchman with the high caste Brahmin woman was rare indeed, and probably unique.

Whilst Zelma and Percy were talking, Mrs Stainer came up.

"Zelma, my dear," said that lady, "it is getting a little chilly. You must put on a wrap of some kind. We have not reached the warm latitudes yet, and the air is still sharp at sunset."

Percy rose, and silently took a shawl from Mrs Stainer, which he folded round Zelma's shoulders.

She looked up and gravely thanked him. Then, without a word, he walked away, leaving Mrs Stainer chatting volubly about some new phase in Miss Seton's griffinage.

So, then, this was Miss Anderson after all; and a feeling of actual disappointment crept over Percy. His judgment for once

had been wrong; he had been deceived; yes, self-deceived by appearances; for, with all his penetration, he had failed to detect the East Indian element in her. But now that he knew, his prejudice rose within him; he began to invest her, in his own mind, with all the faults and failings of the despised race. Yet, as he recalled the musings of only half an hour ago, while he talked to her, he hesitated to condemn her all at once, to drop her to the level of the self-indulgent, inoffensive, feeble Eurasian.

He went over to the other side of the ship, and sat down by himself, too much disgusted to talk to any of the idlers lounging about. It irritated him that he should have been attracted, and that he should have erred in that very judgment of human nature upon which he prided himself. It did not lessen his irritation to find that the girl's face lingered in his memory. Presently he got up and walked backwards and forwards, keeping away from Zelma's chair. When the dressing-bell rang, he went down to his cabin, and he saw no more of her that evening. In spite of himself, he watched to see if she would come with Minnie to dinner, but that little person was alone. As soon as she sat down, she said,—

"So you have made my friend's acquaintance, Mr Bell? Now, tell me honestly if she does not answer my description of her?"

"Yes, she is everything in appearance you said she was; and, having found you correct so far, I will take your word for it, that she is as clever as she is beautiful," replied Percy, in the tone of a man who would satisfy a persistent child, and dismiss the subject. "How did you get on with your game of 'Bull,' Miss Beaumont?"

Minnie, who was always easily led, took up the new topic at once, and launched out upon an animated description of the afternoon's amusement.

The next day Zelma was well enough to take her place amongst the assembled company in the saloon. Her seat at the table was on the other side of Miss Seton; consequently Percy Bell was almost out of reach of her. They could not converse unless the conversation became general. He had no wish, however, to talk to her; and, at first, rather avoided her than otherwise. She, on her part, made no effort to secure his attention. Occasionally they found themselves together on deck, and a few words passed between them; but the subject which was nearest her heart — India — was never mentioned. The knowledge that she partly belonged to India kept him scrupulously silent, lest he should hurt her feelings by a thoughtless criticism of her mother's people.

Although they did not "get on," to the

great disappointment of the enthusiastic Minnie, Percy, nevertheless, felt far more interest in the woman who had excited his unbounded admiration than he cared to express. He watched her closely with an eagerness he was ashamed of, hoping and fearing at the same time to find those very traits he considered were the blemish of her race. He interested himself in her daily doings, expecting to hear that she slept and idled half the day away; he was disappointed and pleased to learn that she led a far more busy life than her friend Minnie. He noted her liking for jewels, and congratulated himself upon having discovered one Oriental feature in her character; but again he was astonished when he noted her disregard for dress. Her dresses—thanks to the dressmaker and Miss Benson—were perfectly made, and of rich, becoming material; but from the little variety she displayed, and the rarity with which she changed,—appearing day after day in the same until climate suggested another,—she showed herself utterly indifferent to her frocks. Minnie, on the contrary, would appear in three or four different costumes in the day.

After the first few days the weather grew warm and fine, and the passengers became accustomed to the motion of the ship.

"What have you been doing with yourselves all this morning?" asked Mr Bell,

pleasantly, of the two girls one day as they sat down to lunch.

"I have been reading a novel, and Zelma has been carving half the morning, and translating the other half," replied Minnie.

"Carving half the morning! It sounds as if Miss Anderson had been assisting the steward in some way. Will you kindly explain, Miss Beaumont," exclaimed Percy, much amused.

"Zelma is very fond of carving wood. She does it beautifully. She is now at work on some lovely panels for a cabinet."

Percy glanced across at Zelma in surprise. Those soft white hands looked very innocent of carvers' tools.

"And when she was tired of whittling, and littering our cabin floor with shavings, she got out her Italian and went on with her translation."

Again Mr Bell appeared surprised.

"I lived a good deal in Italy during my boyhood," he said, "and know Italian almost as well as my native tongue. May I ask what book it is that you are translating, Miss Anderson?"

She replied without any sign of self-consciousness, mentioning the name of the author—a poor, insignificant writer scarcely worthy of translation.

"May I see the book? It is not one that I know," asked Percy.

"Certainly."

After lunch she brought not only the volume, but also the translation she was making. She placed the two in his hands, sat down on a chair near him, and, without a word, began to ply her needle upon a piece of silk which she was embroidering. The book was very handsomely bound—a perfect gem in the binder's art; but its matter was poor. Percy read a few pages and put it down.

"It is utterly unworthy of its binding, and, I should say, of your attention."

He then took up the translation. It was written on rare and beautiful paper. "What a taste this girl has for luxury," thought Percy. "She takes the cream of all things, in queenly fashion, as her due."

He began to read the clear writing, each letter of which was perfectly formed and curiously detached from its fellows, without in any way producing illegibility. Here and there a dark descending line in the graceful curve of a capital indicated the warm, artistic nature of the writer; and the firmly-crossed "ts" showed the will.

Percy laid down the manuscript and took up the book again. Then he compared the one with the other.

"The translation, like the binding, is too good for the book. You have not only idealised the author's sentiments, but you have also clothed them in far more beautiful

language than he has at his command. This is scarcely a translation. It is an original work, elaborating the best sentiments of the writer."

Percy was growing almost enthusiastic. He continued to read on, and turned over another leaf of the rich, vellum-like paper. Here the black ink was exchanged for red. she glanced up and said,—

"The writing in red ink is really original. It seemed to me," she explained, "that the author had in his mind what I have written down; but that words failed him, and he could not crystallise his thoughts into language. You will notice that the fault of the work lies more in its poor, ill-expressed sentences, which only half convey his meaning, than in its sentiments."

"In your language they are beautiful," was the outspoken, unqualified praise. "But why take an inferior author and idealise him? Why not choose one more worthy of your pen?"

"Perhaps I find a charm in that very idealisation. To me there is nothing more fascinating than beautifying and enriching what is ugly and poor; especially when I find the germs of beauty in it. I cannot paint the lily, but I can invest the dry stick with tender green leaves and delicate buds. If I tried to originate without anything to build upon, I might only produce a dry stick."

"Is this how you treated your lessons in your schooldays? Did you idealise French grammar and English history?"

"I think I did in a measure," said Zelma, with a smile. "But it was extremely difficult to indulge in sentiment under the sharp criticism of the prosaic conservative schoolgirl world in which I lived. It is true that they had a 'shibboleth' of romance, in which handsome young men and rich husbands entered. But anything beyond that, was held up by them to scorn as incomprehensible and absurd. Schoolgirl life for girls is like the painful but necessary pruning which a plant must undergo at the hands of the judicious gardener before it can burst into rich blossom or bear delicious fruit."

Percy looked at her curiously. He was pleased to have got her upon the subject of self.

"Have you suffered at the hands of a mental gardener?" he asked, falling readily into her figure of speech.

"Yes, I feel pruned and trimmed down to an unnatural shape; and this," touching the manuscript, "is a slight breaking away from the narrow rigorous laws of the schoolroom. Whilst I write, I am conscious that my Italian master would thoroughly condemn such a free translation."

"Why should he condemn it?"

"He would say that it possessed neither

the merit of being the translation I call it, nor of being an original work, capable of standing on its own merits. To translate and beautify the author's ideas, as well as his language, would be a positive crime in his eyes."

Percy's eyes rested with pleasure on the mobile features of the speaker.

"It is a gift indeed," he said, "to be able to invest prosaic and commonplace things with beauty."

"Or say, rather, to develop and draw out the hidden loveliness of the prosaic and commonplace," said Zelma eagerly. "You would have cast that book aside as containing nothing worthy of a reader's attention; whereas I am digging out a few gems in the rough, which I am cutting and setting, till their intrinsic value is fully brought to light."

"You not only discern what may be done, but you do it, and do it well."

There was approval and praise in his tones, and Zelma flushed under the earnest gaze which accompanied the speech. She became suddenly conscious that the conversation had turned upon self—a subject which she generally avoided.

She was beginning to have some confidence in Percy, however. His criticism was very different from that of her schoolfellows. More than once she had been

surprised and pleased to meet with honest and hearty sympathy from him, instead of a narrow-minded wonder at her eccentric line of thought. The wider range of vision, the broader views on things in general, the tolerance that he showed towards opinions which differed from those he held, lifted her into a new sphere, and gave elbow-room and air for her mind. As she talked, she experienced a new sensation, which produced confidence, and she was grateful. The knowledge that he would not crush her down with platitudes made her speak of herself; she said simply, in reply to his words of praise,—

"Action follows thought very rapidly with me, almost too rapidly. Some day I may be carried away into action before I have given myself time for deliberate thought; then I am afraid I shall do something foolish."

"Yet it is often the rapidity of action upon thought that makes the hero."

The conversation drifted off into another channel; and they talked on, scarcely heeding how time flew by, for more than an hour.

Percy once again forgot the despised East Indian in the woman before him. As his eye rested upon her face, he could not help thinking how well her mind accorded with her features; and how very unlike she was to any Eurasian he had ever met before.

CHAPTER VII.

DANGEROUS SYMPATHY.

"We pine for kindred natures
To mingle with our own."
MRS HEMANS.

PORT SAID, that gate of the East leading the traveller from the temperate zone to the tropics, was passed. The sight of the blue-clad Egyptians and dirty Arabs again awoke memories in Zelma's mind, and she recalled many little incidents of the journey home with her father. The weather grew considerably warmer after entering the Red Sea; the energy of the passengers at the same time abated; they lolled listlessly about in their deck chairs, gave up their vigorous constitutionals, and got weary of their games. Punkahs were called into requisition, and the chief steward had to provide a never-failing supply of ice for the thirsty folk.

Mrs Stainer, who was an old traveller, did not seem inconvenienced by the change

of temperature; but Miss Seton and Minnie were not so happy. The former declined, on principle, to clothe herself in thin white dresses, which she said were only fit for girls in their teens; and, as for sleeping on deck, exposed to the view of the quarter-master and lascars on duty for the night, the notion filled her with genuine horror.

"I would rather die of asphyxia!" she exclaimed.

"But you will suffer terribly from the heat, my dear Miss Seton. Why should you mind doing what every one else is going to do? We shall all be there to support you."

"Because other people disregard the laws of decency on board ship, I do not see why I should. I never had occasion to blush so much before for my fellow-creatures. The other morning, directly after I left my cabin dressed for breakfast, I met that old Colonel St George prowling about in his night-clothes. He carried his sponge and towels, so, I presume, he was going to the bath. Ever since then I have most carefully avoided him, for I am sure he would blush to meet me face to face after our morning encounter."

Mrs Stainer burst into a merry peal of laughter, which shook her plump little figure.

"You are supposed never to see any one on board ship in the morning, till he is

dressed. You should look another way. The sexes are dead cuts in their dressing-gowns. When they appear at breakfast, properly and decently clothed, they greet each other as though they were met for the first time."

"But I could not help seeing Colonel St George; we met face to face in the saloon. And, what is more, I am quite sure that he felt the situation keenly, poor man!"

Mrs Stainer knew the Colonel to be a veteran traveller, like herself, well versed in the manners and customs of life on board a P. and O. steamer. The suggestion that he suffered from shyness caused Mrs Stainer to shake again with laughter.

Miss Seton's mode of protesting was to retire ostentatiously to her cabin for the night, just as the other ladies were coming out, in their frilled and lace-trimmed dressing-gowns, to pass the dark hours on the breezy deck. Here the night wind cooled them, and the pleasant wash of the waves against the ship's hull lulled them to sleep.

The hot winds blew up the Red Sea, growing daily more like blasts from some fiery furnace, and bringing clouds of fine, almost invisible sand from the burning desert. The sun poured fiercely down upon the dark-blue water all day, and sank in a blaze of red light. Beautiful

banks of purple cloud varied the sunsets, and suggested to the traveller refreshing showers of rain, which never fell on those heat-bound, wind-blown shores.

Minnie's spirits went down before the weariness and discomfort of the long days and unrefreshing nights. If she stayed in the saloon or cabin, she felt suffocated; if she sat on deck, she was blinded by the dust and glare. She grew limp and silent, and the colour faded from her cheeks.

Zelma was the only one amongst the ladies who did not appear to suffer. Clad in a cool white frock, she seemed to enjoy the heightened temperature. She had seen too little of the sun in England, and now his fierce rays warmed her into life; they awoke her soul out of its torpidity. She never looked hot, or felt suffocated, as Minnie did. During the great heat of the day, she sat under the punkah in the saloon, always employed with her work, or her reading or writing. When the sun was in the west, she appeared on deck, walked slowly to and fro, or sat in some part where she could see the deep blue of the sea, and the golden hazy horizon. The sunsets were a daily delight to her. She watched the great ball of fire descend into the barren deserts with the enthusiasm of a fire worshipper. She extended her white hands towards the setting sun, if she thought

herself alone, and bathed her arms in his rosy light, the delicate cream lace falling from her fair skin, enriched with the same hue.

One evening, when they were nearing the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, and the heat was greater than anything they had hitherto experienced, Percy found her leaning over the bulwarks. The other passengers were exhausted with the burden of the day. No sounds of merriment now rang through the ship; but people laid their limp forms back in their chairs, or crept about with pale, weary faces, vainly searching for a cooler place or more breezy corner.

Zelma thought herself alone. She leaned over and looked down into the intense blue of the water below, that boiled with snowy froth as the ship cut her way through it. Her eyes followed the waves till they reached the gleaming oily trail on the water, stretching miles away in the ship's wake. The light of the sun touched the sea, and strewed the turquoise path with golden lights.

Percy approached her, and she turned on him a face radiant with delight. Her eyes shone like the diamonds upon her hands, and the sun's rays found an answering light in their depths. Her tall, rounded figure stood firm and supple by the taffrail, whilst the rich material of her dress fell

in soft folds about her. She was like a priestess of the sun, waiting to chant his evening hymn of praise the moment he touched the horizon. Her lips parted in a smile of pleasure as she said, in a low tone,—

"Is it not gloriously beautiful?"

"It is," and Percy spoke from his heart, for the scene and the figure were in perfect harmony. His hearty concurrence gave her confidence. She searched his face for a moment, and then said,—

"Shall I tell you what I feel?"

He drew a little closer to her and looked into her eyes as though he would read her soul.

"Yes, if you can; but it is not easy to put the feelings of a moment into words."

"They are not the feelings of a moment. I have been conscious for days past that my spirit was thawing under a new influence; I have been gradually awakening out of a cold, dead dream into a new life. It was the sun I wanted, the glorious golden light, with its life-giving rays. It gives me no pain, and does not hurt me as it hurts the others. Its rays seem to kiss me as though they loved me, and I am filled with happiness. Oh, you beautiful sun, why do you look so coldly down upon England, and veil your beauty from her? Why have you starved my soul so long, and let me be imprisoned in fogs till my heart died within me?"

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She seemed to forget Percy's presence altogether for the moment.

The sun touched the horizon, and gradually sank into a bed of purple haze, strewing his path with trails of burnished gold and flecks of crimson cloud.

"How you must have hungered in the cold, grey days of spring and autumn for the warm sun," said Percy presently, unwilling to let her mood pass away. It was something so unusual, so unlike what he expected to find in the modern girl, that he felt a keen desire to study her further.

"I did; I longed to dazzle my eyes in his light. I used to look up at the poor, pale, sickly thing that struggled so pitifully with the clouds, and was so often beaten off the field for days and days by the fog and rain, and wish I could help him out. Nature seemed so sad and insignificant in those cold climes."

"As if she were numb with her own chilliness," put in Percy, as she paused a moment. His words had the desired effect, and she continued,—

"The wind never roared as it roars in our Indian cyclone. The thunder and lightning were feeble and unworthy of the name. Two or three flashes overhead were followed by two or three short peals of thunder, and the storm was passed. I remember how, as a child at home, I used to watch the tempests and delight in their rage. The lightning

ran along the skies, interlacing and weaving the clouds in crinkled threads of light, or flashed down to the earth in blinding balls of red and blue fire; the thunder never ceased to roar, sometimes crashing above like the rending of sheets of brass, sometimes dying away in deep, sonorous echoes that shook the very earth. And this was not a momentary pleasure. It lasted for hours, till one had had one's fill, and could say, 'Enough, enough!' When I first saw a thunderstorm in England, I climbed on to the window-ledge, and sat watching eagerly for the continuous flicker and glare to which I was accustomed. Miss Benson found me and dragged me in; she closed the window with some ejaculations to the effect that I was tempting Providence. The looking-glasses and knives were covered with cloths, and the girls huddled fearfully together in the middle of the room. I broke away from them, and danced near the window, shrieking out my delight at each flash. They looked at me with awe, and thought that I was stricken with an uncanny madness. How could they understand that the tempest was bearing my imprisoned spirit back to the land of my birth, that it was the one touch of nature that linked me with my home? The girls laughed at me, and called me the storm fiend. I did not know what 'storm fiend' meant, but I understood the

laugh. It was only one of the many lessons that taught me to hide my heart. Perhaps, even now, you are pitying me for my want of nerve balance, for my sensitiveness to the influences of nature."

She glanced into Percy's face in momentary suspicion; there was nothing there but sympathy — the unmistakable sympathy which a young man feels for a beautiful woman who has appealed to his heart, and whom his inner consciousness tells him is in no way unworthy of his regard.

But, though Mr Bell was greatly attracted in spite of his prejudices, he was not prepared to allow that she commanded his unqualified admiration. There was still an unfathomed background wherein those dreaded characteristics of the East Indian might yet be found. He must know her in her own home, see her with her mother, when she would have every opportunity of degenerating into the inferior creature he believed her to be; before he would admit that she was different from all others, or allow that she possessed a mind as rare as her beauty, a soul that could rise unstained out of the mire of Oriental sloth and sensuousness. If she proved impervious to the home influences of her father's house, she would indeed be a queen of women. It was only this strong underlying doubt of her that saved him from falling desperately in love.

He was stirred by her appeal, and answered warmly,—

"Far from pitying you, I envy you your capacity for appreciating nature. I believe that I have sometimes experienced the same feeling, for I, too, have a strain of foreign blood in my veins. You ought never to have been sent to England. Italy would have made you a far more congenial home. I passed seven years of my boyhood with my grandmother in that country; those seven years saved me from being crushed mentally by the public school life which followed in England. Surely a school could have been found for you in sunny France, or warm-hearted Italy."

"My life would have been incomplete if I had not seen my father's land. There were moments, too, when I actually felt the climate to be in accordance with my mood; when I looked at my sensitiveness with the eye of cold criticism. A strange desire to calculate the cost of my dreams and fancies came over me, and by a process of introspection I asked myself, what was the good of encouraging a poetical spirit in these times, when everything has to pass through the fiery furnace of reason, and nothing is left to romance and faith. Why was I so moved? and why was I so receptive of the ephemeral influences of nature? My head sat in judgment on my heart, and condemned me. But it did not last long, the

mood passed, and my heart swayed me more passionately than ever."

She paused, scarcely daring to lay her soul so bare, but there was that in Percy's face which told her that she might go on. He bent his ear to catch what she said.

"It was as though my father's and my mother's nature warred within me. Sometimes the warm-hearted untutored emotion, which I know I inherit from my mother, surges hotly and turbulently through my heart; and, when it has exhausted itself, and lies feeble and strengthless, the precise, judicial nature of my Scotch father rises and sits in judgment on the past mood, analysing it with bitter irony. It is strange that one should contain within one's self the elements of the judge and the defendant. It is only during the last year or so of my school life that this critical spirit of introspection has arisen. At first I thought that I had caught it from my schoolfellows, or that the climate and the education together had developed it. But, as I learn to know myself, I find the germs of it are deeply rooted within me. As long as I live I shall feel my father's calculating nature dogging the footsteps of my mother's impulsive emotion."

The glories of the sunset were fast fading from the sky, and the calm of the evening, with its warm, soft greys and half-lights,

was settling over the sea. It seemed to have entered Zelma's soul. Passion, like the sun, had set, and her heart was still. Percy longed to hear more. He would have liked to hear about that mother; and, if possible, would have led the girl to speak of her. But the mood was passed; and she had already said more than she would have believed it possible she could have confided to a stranger.

He made no attempt to detain her as she turned away with a sigh. Delicacy of feeling kept him silent, and he was content to wait until she should choose to tell him more. His mode of studying was not to tear and rend the delicate flower to pieces, but to watch its growth, and look into its heart as it grew. If he thrust in his prying fingers, and tore away the sensitive petals with ruthless curiosity, he would destroy the flower, or cause it to close against him altogether.

"This will be the worst night of the whole voyage," said a voice at his elbow.

He turned, and saw Minnie and Mrs Stainer. Poor Minnie! she looked but a shadow of her former self.

"Yes, it will be very trying; but when once we have passed the straits, matters will improve, and we shall have Miss Beaumont looking her old bright self again," said Percy, smiling kindly at the exhausted girl.

"Will Trichinopoly be like this?" asked Minnie, half fearing to hear the answer.

"Oh, no, nothing so unbearable. The thermometer may go up as high as it is now, but you will not get this moist enervating heat on those sunny plains. The heat will be dry and almost bracing," replied Mrs Stainer.

"It is comforting to hear you say so, for I do not think I could bear much more of this kind of climate. I am dreading to-night."

"It will be your worst. Have you persuaded Miss Seton to come on deck to-night?" Percy asked, turning to Mrs Stainer.

"Not yet, but I am going to do so. I am going to try my best to conquer her prejudices. We shall have her ill upon our hands if we let her pass another twelve hours below."

"We will attack her at dinner," said Percy, "and frighten her into it, if possible. I will tell her some terrible tales of people being asphyxiated, and dying of heat apoplexy from want of air."

Accordingly, at dinner, Miss Seton was attacked on all sides; and although she still remained as adamant up to the end of the meal, she began to waver when she reached her cabin, and was about to prepare for bed.

The breeze, such as it was, died away at nine o'clock, and a heavy pall of hot vapour

settled down upon the panting, labouring ship, as it steamed down the narrowing sea. Mrs Stainer found Miss Seton in the hands of the perspiring stewardess.

"This lady really ought not to remain below, ma'am. I have just given her some brandy and water because she felt so faint. I am going to ask the steward to take her bed up at once."

The stewardess left her in Mrs Stainer's charge, and went to call the steward, without giving her time to make any objections.

"I really cannot go on deck in my night-clothes!" cried Miss Seton, almost in tears.

"Then lie down in a loose frock, and it will not matter who sees you," replied Mrs Stainer, rather out of patience with her obstinate friend.

The notion pleased her. An old dress of thin texture—comfortable, and at the same time highly respectable—was found; clad in this, Miss Seton was conducted upstairs, her trepidation conquered by the thought that, if occasion required it, she was equal to any emergency, even to interviewing the captain himself.

Her bed was placed in a line with Mrs Stainer's, between that lady's and Minnie's. There was an awning overhead; the wall of the music-room sheltered them at the back; the donkey-engine, swathed in tarpaulin, fenced them in at the feet. Between the

wall and the engine, a screen of canvas was stretched, to seclude the ladies from the gentlemen.

Miss Seton was not at all satisfied with the position assigned her, and insisted on having the corner next to the canvas screen.

"You will have the gentlemen close to you if you sleep there," said Mrs Stainer.

"I do not mind that in the least," she replied. "The canvas hides us as completely as the walls of our cabin; with the screen on one side, and you on the other, I shall feel as private as if I were below. It is much cooler up here, and I shall sleep better than I have slept for nights past."

"I hope you will; if you want anything in the night, or feel alarmed, do not scruple to wake me," said Mrs Stainer, as she settled herself down on her pillows. "If it is very hot, I may move my bed more out into the open; so do not be surprised if you find my position changed by the morning."

One by one the ladies passed into the land of dreams; Miss Seton, who needed rest and sleep more than any of them, fell into the deepest slumber.

Just on the other side of the canvas screen lay Colonel St George. He was very hot, and felt the heat terribly. It grew hotter and hotter as the night advanced; at length the Colonel found it intolerable. There was not a breath of air, and the

current caused by the progress of the steamer was interrupted by the canvas screen. He got up, and untying the cords, softly rolled it on one side, hoping devoutly that the fair sex was sound asleep, and unconcious of his enormity. Not a single word of remonstrance fell on his ear, so he decided to leave the screen thus folded back for a few hours. Before morning broke he would replace it; and none of the ladies would ever know that the rude eye of man had desecrated their slumbers. He looked across the row of sleeping forms, and idly wondered which fair dame was lying in happy unconciousness next him. Rolling himself in his sheet, he breathed again, and was soon fast asleep.

Very early the next morning, before it was light, Miss Seton awoke. The heat had considerably decreased, and a fresh breeze was blowing. Bab el Mandeb was passed, and the horrors of the Red Sea were over.

Miss Seton was somewhat confused when consciousness first returned to her; for the moment, she could not remember where she was. Her sleep had been heavy but refreshing, such as she had not enjoyed since she left the Mediterranean. A faint light in the East told her that it was morning, and though still very sleepy, she decided on stealing off at once to her cabin before the others awoke.

Hastily turning to the sleeping form

beside her, she crept quietly up to it, and laid a disturbing hand upon its shoulder. The sleeper was rolled tightly in the sheet,—for the morning air was cool,—and slept soundly. Miss Seton's gentle touch developed into a firm grasp; and finally in her haste to be off, she administered a vigorous shaking. At last the sleeper stirred; and the stirring was followed by a rapidly returning consciousness. The plump rounded form rolled over on to its back, raised itself out of its enveloping sheet, and looked into the astonished face of Miss Seton. It was not the friendly gaze of Mrs Stainer that met her horror-struck eyes, but the sleep-bewildered, somewhat irate old face of Colonel St George.

Miss Seton turned and fled; never stopping till she had safely reached her cabin; and there she flung herself down on the sofa, overwhelmed with shame and confusion.

The thought that she had gone deliberately to the bedside of a gentleman, and rudely shaken him out of his slumbers, was intolerable. Her face grew scarlet again and again as she pondered over it. Never, never more would she be tempted to leave the seclusion of her cabin at night. Never would she submit to be herded together with members of both the sexes. She would rather die of the heat ten times over.

As for Colonel St George, when his wits

had fully returned, he guessed in a moment what had happened. Without a word he got up and quietly replaced the canvas screen; smiling to himself as he recalled the terror-stricken face, which had met his waking gaze.

A little later Mrs Stainer and Minnie opened their eyes. The morning was rapidly growing, and a beautiful sheet of yellow light was spreading over the sky. Mrs Stainer's eye fell upon the empty bed by her side.

"Miss Seton is before us. She has probably gone down in high glee at not having been seen," she said; as she, with others, got up, and shook out the folds of creased lace and frill upon their dressing-gowns.

"We have had a splendid night, and it seems ever so much fresher and cooler this morning," said Minnie.

"We passed the straits last night, and the worst is over," replied Mrs Stainer. "We shall have you girls dancing and enjoying yourselves once more, I hope."

As soon as Mrs Stainer reached the cabin, Miss Seton plunged into her tale, and related the terrible things that had happened to her.

"Yes," she concluded, "I actually took Colonel St George by the shoulder and shook him as he lay there in his own bed.

Oh! what will he think of me? I can never face him again!" moaned the poor distracted lady.

"I cannot understand it at all," said Mrs Stainer. "The canvas screen was between us and the gentleman. You surely did not find your way round to the other side of it to look for me?"

"I assure you there was no canvas screen when I awoke; I forgot its very existence, and thought only of the one bed I had seen beside me when I fell asleep; that one was occupied by you. When I awoke my eye fell on Colonel St George, and I naturally took him for you, I was too confused to remember on which side of me you had slept."

Mrs Stainer tried hard to keep her countenance as she looked at Miss Seton; but she failed in her attempt, and laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks. It only increased Miss Seton's distress. She refused to be comforted, and turned angrily from Mrs Stainer, who strove hard to command her features, as she endeavoured to persuade her friend to go with her to breakfast in the saloon.

After breakfast Mrs Stainer found Colonel St George, and asked for an explanation. He confided to her what he had done, and gave a vivid description of the awakening scene. Mrs Stainer went off again into another fit of uncontrollable laughter, in which the Colonel joined.

"But it will not do to let the other ladies know that I removed their screen in the night. There will be a round robin sent in to the captain, requesting him to put me ashore at Aden for my sins, and I shall be left to come on by the next ship. You must befriend me, and do your best to persuade Miss Seton that it was a night-mare, a waking dream," and the two conspirators indulged in another fit of laughter.

"I will do my best for you," said Mrs Stainer as she went back to her friend.

She was as good as her word. To the end of the journey Miss Seton was undecided whether that terrible encounter was an awful fact, or whether it was only a hideous waking dream.

Colonel St George met her exactly as usual; she could detect no sign of consciousness in him; nor was there any one, apparently, who knew anything about the removal of the screen during the night. On the contrary, every one laughed at the notion; and pointed out the impossibility of its being removed without the knowledge of those who slept near it. She was obliged at last to doubt her own senses; and, if the truth must be told, she was not sorry to believe that she had been mistaken.

CHAPTER VIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

"And jewels,
Of rich and exquisite form; their value's great;
And I am something curious, being strange,
To have them in safe stowage."
Cymbeline, Act v. Sc. 2.

EXACTLY thirty days after they had started from the London docks, they reached the harbour of Madras. When Colombo was passed, Zelma lived in a ferment of expectation. A telegram was handed to her at Colombo from her father, telling her that he would meet her at Madras, and that she was to await his coming before landing.

The captain timed his arrival so as to get into the harbour about ten o'clock in the morning. Zelma was on deck as soon as she heard that the shore of the Coromandel coast was in sight. A warm grey vapour hung over the land, but she could just distinguish the sand and surf, and a fringe of drought-stricken palms beyond. Here and there a bare rocky hill peeped above the vegetation. St Thomas' Mount was sighted, and the coming of the

Bombay was signalled from there to Madras.

An hour later the engines slowed down, and the pilot came on board to take them into the harbour. The long low buildings, the Chepauk Palace, the Senate House, and the public offices, that seemed to crouch along the sandy beach in dismal straggling length, and look sleepily over the sea, were all pointed out to Zelma by Percy. Now that the journey was nearly over, he seemed unable to tear himself away from her side. Their intimacy had grown very pleasant to him during the latter part of the voyage. It flattered him to find that she gave him her full confidence; he was fascinated, and very often drawn to her side when common sense told him to keep away.

Whilst he listened and looked, he told himself repeatedly that she was nothing to him, nor ever could be more than an interesting acquaintance.

"But I understand her better than any of her friends. I am the only one amongst them all who has any comprehension of what is passing in that wonderful rich and fertile mind of hers."

Then his thoughts would run on with all kinds of speculations as to how she would act under certain circumstances; how she would greet her father; how she would accommodate her life to the possible ex-

actions which would be made by her strange mother.

The anchors fell into the water with a mighty plunge, and the ship swung slowly round to the wind. A number of boats were awaiting its coming, and before it had fairly settled down to its moorings in the harbour, the boatmen hurried towards it, fastening upon her like greedy parasites, ready to rob her of cargo and passengers.

A large masulah boat, fitted up with cushions and an awning, came rapidly from the pier-head. It was rowed by a number of stalwart boatmen, who chanted a strange nasal melody in rhythm with their rowing.

Zelma scanned the boat eagerly; and she caught sight of the form of a gentleman almost hidden beneath the awning.

"It is my father!" she exclaimed.

As the boat neared the ship, she leaned over the bulwarks above the gangway, which had been lowered, and stood with her eyes fixed on the advancing boat. Her hand clasped the rail, and her lips were parted with a smile of joyous expectancy.

Donald Anderson bent forward and looked up. He did not recognise his daughter, but ran his eye along the row of strange faces which were watching him from above. As his eye passed over Zelma, she gave a quick sudden movement; and Percy, who stood next her, felt the hand

which he had laid on the taffrail suddenly seized in her soft, nervous fingers. It was but a momentary touch, to express the feelings for which she had no words. Then the two white hands of the daughter were extended towards the father as Percy had seen them thrown out towards the sun in the Red Sea. She was hardly conscious of her companion's presence; she would have seized the hand of the stewardess, or of Colonel St George, or of any one else known to her had they happened to be standing next to her at the time.

But with Percy it was different. His whole attention was taken up with studying the woman by his side; the grasp of those fingers, trembling with suppressed emotion, thrilled him through. Her hand had never touched his before, and he was surprised at the new experience. It had suddenly rent away an inner curtain, and communicated to him, with an irresistible force, what was passing through her mind. He was filled with an unconquerable longing to feel the touch of that hand again.

Yielding to the impulse, he pressed up towards the opening of the gangway, making it the excuse to draw her with a firm clasp through the crowd and on to the little platform that hung over the sea. Her father had his foot upon the steps, and was bounding like a young and vigorous man up

towards his daughter. Not till he reached her did Percy relax his grasp; then, slipping behind, he fell back amongst the rest, unnoticed by either father or daughter.

Donald Anderson's face was not much changed. It was given to sternness when in repose; but now, smiling down upon the fair girl who stood before him, he looked a handsome and happy man. It was a new sensation for him to feel himself the possessor, the father of such a beautiful daughter, and a glow of paternal pride rushed through his heart as his eye rested upon her. His wealth, his work, the huge machinery of his office, of which he was the motive power, all faded for a moment from his mind. The world had but one thing for him, and that was the sweet young girl who called him "father." He passed his arm round her waist, and drew her away towards a less crowded part of the ship. There they sat down to talk, forgetful of all else around them.

A pang of jealousy shot through Percy's heart as he saw them go; he realised that his intimacy with her was over. They might meet again, and even stay together under the same roof, or they might not. In any case, the old life had ended with the dropping of the anchors, and the cessation of the monotonous beat of the engines. His jealousy annoyed him; he went below to

finish his packing. Why should he trouble himself with a vulgar curiosity as to what the daughter was saying to the father? and yet he would have liked much to be by her side, to meet the look of pride and pleasure —which he knew was shining in her eyes —with an answering look of sympathy. He seized his portmanteau and set himself to work with an impatient energy that left no time for thought.

Miss Seton had taken time by the forelock; for, as Mrs Stainer was going below to collect her belongings, she met that lady coming up, preceded by her luggage.

"You are off very quickly," said Mrs Stainer, in surprise.

"Yes; I had everything ready when we got into harbour. I am anxious to get away from the ship, and all these horrid, naked boatmen swarming about the place. Good-bye, dear Mrs Stainer; we shall meet again, I hope, as I certainly intend visiting Trichinopoly before I leave the country."

"You must come and stay with me among our Christian converts, and see a little of our missionary work," said Mrs Stainer.

"I shall be delighted, I am sure," replied Miss Seton, who, having lost sight of her luggage, was in a fever to depart. She had the inexperienced traveller's notion that her portmanteaux would take wings to themselves and fly away; or that evil-minded

thieves would lay light fingers upon them and manage to secrete them amongst their scanty clothing; notwithstanding the fact that each box weighed something over fifty pounds. Mrs Stainer saw her perturbation, and hastened her adieux.

The kind-hearted Minnie was not only struggling with her own, but with Zelma's belongings, for they were all anxious to land before lunch. When the packing was finished, Mrs Stainer and Minnie went on deck.

The good missionary's wife was recognised at once by Anderson, and greeted warmly.

"I promised your husband that I would take charge of you and Miss Beaumont, and see you safely to Trichinopoly. I have taken rooms for you at the Elphinstone Hotel," he said.

Mrs Stainer was only too glad to have such an escort. At this moment Percy came on deck, and, seeing the group, advanced. He was introduced to Anderson, who immediately asked him, as a friend of Mrs Stainer, to join their party and proceed at once to the hotel, where they would find lunch awaiting them.

Then followed the bustle and confusion of getting the luggage transhipped into the boat. All except Minnie were familiar with the appearance of the muscular brown boatmen; and Percy, Mrs Stainer, and Anderson

understood their language. The harsh, many-syllabled words fell strangely on Zelma's ears, like the faint memories of a bygone dream.

"Do you understand them?" asked Anderson, with an amused smile.

"It is gradually coming back to me; it is only another part of my awakening," she replied; and her eye passed from her father to Percy, who said, quickly and without thought,—

"It is better that you should not understand all they say. Do not try to recall the language of your childhood."

"Forget my mother's tongue! On the contrary, I intend to make it my study," said Zelma with animation, forgetting the new presence amongst them.

Donald Anderson looked curiously from one to the other, and a shade of annoyance passed over his face as the mother's name was mentioned. Already his thoughts were busy with mother and daughter; he began to wonder what this highly-educated and refined girl would think of the native woman who had given her birth.

"Your mother speaks English as well as I do, my child. You have no need to learn Tamil. Our servants also speak English. It is far better to leave the uncouth tongue alone," he said.

"But for my mother's sake I must learn

it," persisted Zelma. "What will she think of a daughter who cannot take the trouble to learn her own language?" and she looked questioningly from Percy to her father, and then back at Percy again.

The young man made no reply. He felt that he was on delicate ground; and it was a relief to all that the boat, at this moment, touched the pier, and the subject of the conversation was forgotten in the excitement of landing.

They were detained at the Custom House for a few minutes; there they found poor bewildered Miss Seton. On arriving at the pier-head, her boxes had been seized by chattering coolies, who had fought for their possession. To her distracted eyes they seemed to go off to the four quarters of the globe. In vain she called, begged, and entreated; they disappeared, leaving her with a crowd of idle, inodorous Hindus looking on. A native overseer, in European dress and a neat turban, explained to her that all was right; she would find her boxes at the Custom House. He recommended her to pay the boatmen, who were clamouring around her; and, when that was done, he put her into a trolly; he directed another coolie to pilot her to the Custom House, and thus she began her travels through India.

At the Custom House she was asked to sign and fill in papers to assert that she had

no gunpowder, wine, arms, or machinery hidden amongst her bonnets and frocks. She assured the fat stolid clerks that there was nothing in her luggage but wearing apparel. They would not be satisfied except by her signing papers, a proceeding she strenuously resisted. At this junction Percy entered the office, and his appearance was hailed with joy by Miss Seton. He filled in the obnoxious papers for her, and satisfied her that she was not signing away her life and liberty by placing her name on the documents. The coolies were then directed to take the luggage to the Central Railway Station, as she wished to proceed at once to Bangalore, where she had friends. Miss Seton gave a gasp of despair as she once more saw her precious belongings disappear amongst the crowd in a cloud of dust; but she was somewhat reassured when Percy promised her that she would find them all in an hour's time on the platform of the station. His own servant, who had met him on the pier, was there with an assistant, one of the belted peons allowed by Government to its officials. Percy sent the peon in charge of Miss Seton, telling him to see her and her luggage safely into the train for Bangalore; he gave him strict injunctions that he was not to leave the good lady till the train started. Miss Seton was overcome with gratitude at being thus unexpectedly pro-

vided with a protector; she looked as though she could have fallen upon Percy's neck and kissed him.

"Now, having sent that distraught globe-trotter on her way," said Percy to Anderson, "let us get off at once out of this dusty place, and make for the hotel."

Two hours later they were comfortably seated under the punkah, chatting of their immediate movements.

"Are you leaving by to-night's train?" asked Percy of Anderson.

"No; I have business to-morrow morning which must be attended to. We shall leave to-morrow evening for Trichinopoly. Mrs Stainer and the girls will doubtless not be sorry to rest a few hours before beginning the tedious rail journey."

"Then I shall see you again," said Percy, glancing across at Zelma. "I must go and write my name down at Government House. I also want to see the chief secretary, as I am anxious to know where Government intends to send me. My name has not appeared yet in the gazette."

At dinner they met again. Anderson asked Percy whether his destination was decided upon.

"They were very liberal. They gave me the choice of the acting collectorate of Trichinopoly and of Coimbatore," he replied.

"You chose Coimbatore, of course? It is

such a much better climate, and so near the hills."

"I chose Trichinopoly," and Percy let his eye rest for a moment on Anderson's daughter. She gave no sign of interest, and seemed absorbed in her own thoughts. A look of annoyance passed over his face, and turning to the merchant he continued,— "Yes; I chose Trichinopoly because it is such a much larger and more important town; it will provide me with work. Coimbatore will do for me when another ten years have passed. For the present, it is work that I want."

Anderson looked at the young man with approval. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would gladly have accepted the cooler climate and the less onerous duties of the smaller town.

"You are right, Mr Bell; Trichinopoly has always led a man on to something better, and your ambition will be fulfilled. I see that you possess ambition."

"Ambition should be the keynote of every man's life in India, as well as elsewhere; just as love is the keynote of a woman's life all over the world," returned Percy.

"If the object of the ambition is noble," broke in Zelma, now fully alive to what was passing.

Her father was silent, waiting with an

amused smile to hear what the young man would say next.

"The same may be said of the woman's love. She ennobles herself by loving what is worthy of her; and the object of her love is ennobled through that love. A man's ambition should undoubtedly be fixed on something a little higher than he will ever reach."

"Is he never to be satisfied?" asked the girl.

"Nothing but a sordid, unworthy ambition can ever be fully satisfied. The man who longs for money for what it will bring to him and him only, may be satisfied; so may the man who longs for place and power, simply for its splendour. But the man whose ambition it is to forget himself, and to be successful only in his work for the good of others, can never be satisfied."

"I quite agree with you; but the analogy between woman's love and man's ambition ceases there. A woman's love may find the nobler object, and be satisfied."

"You think so now; but have you ever met with a woman who had found a perfect man, and who had nothing more to desire?"

She laughed.

"My experience is all to come," she said; "at present it does not reach beyond the guarded halls of my school and this voyage."

"It will have to be a very perfect man

who can satisfy Zelma," said Minnie, with animation. "I should be very very sorry to have to marry her. I should be so frightfully conscious of my own inferiority, so utterly unable to preserve the *rôle* of the lord of creation when I knew that she was included in that creation."

They all laughed at the outspoken, simple-hearted girl.

"Is my daughter so very exacting, so very hard to please, then?" asked Anderson of Minnie, looking with a new-born pride and affection at his child.

"We always said at school—" began Minnie impetuously, when Zelma stopped her with a gesture.

"Oh, Minnie, dear! please spare us!" she cried.

Anderson, entering into the humour of the moment, finished the speech for her.

"That Zelma would never marry anyone but a prince amongst men, eh, Miss Beaumont?"

He smiled as he let his eyes rest with paternal pride on his daughter. She had been accustomed to kindness and gentleness from Miss Benson and her schoolfellows; but there was a ring about her father's tones which fell like music on her ear. She turned to him as if in answer to it, and laid her hand on his. It was the beginning of a passionate love on her side,

and a new joy on his, which was to brighten all his life with a glow of autumnal sun.

Although ambition had a great deal to do with Percy's choice, there was an underlying current which carried him in the same direction, and made his choice the more easy and decided.

As collector of Trichinopoly, he would not lose sight of Zelma. The friendship which had begun on board ship, and had already grown to be a great pleasure, could be continued. His curiosity to see her under a new aspect, as the daughter of a native mother, would be satisfied; and he would learn whether his idol was something better than clay. But again he assured himself that he took nothing more than an intelligent interest in her. He was a kind and sympathetic friend, in whom she seemed able to confide. It was possible that his friendship might prove of some value to her. English men and women do not show much cordiality towards girls of like parentage, as they are all prejudiced more or less against the union of the English with the Hindu. The thought that he might perhaps be of some use to her by-and-by was very pleasant; and he saw no danger to himself in it.

He was not in love; of that he assured himself oftener than was necessary. He scorned the notion of such boyish suscepti-

bility. Why should he not be able to befriend a girl like Zelma, and even take a pleasure in watching the different mental changes that swept over her expressive face, without being so feeble as to lose his heart?

Far from being in love, he found himself dispassionately speculating on the kind of man who would marry her.

"Little Minnie was right. She will only be attracted by some one physically and mentally her superior; as her father put it, a very prince amongst men. But such a person does not exist. She will, therefore, never marry."

Curiously enough, the prospect of her remaining single was not at all unpleasant to the young man's thought.

The more Percy saw of Donald Anderson, the better he liked him. Had he not known it to be a fact, he never would have believed that a man of such sound sense, and of such strength of mind, could have married a native. The hard-headed shrewdness, the power of calculation, and the vast experience which Donald had had of the Hindu in all phases of Oriental life, made it difficult to understand how such a thing had taken place. Gazing at him, he wondered what kind of woman it was who had thus succeeded in throwing her spell over him, and he was completely puzzled. The father

was almost as great an enigma as the daughter.

"The man has too much sense to make an ass of himself by mating himself unequally," Percy would say as he vainly speculated on the subject. It only made him more eager to visit this interesting family, when its circle was completed by the addition of the daughter.

"I must go to Storr's this morning," said Anderson, just before they parted at the breakfast-table. "I have been buying gems for you, Zelma, and Storr is setting them. I propose that you should all come and see them this morning."

There was an exclamation of ready assent on the part of Mrs Stainer and the two girls.

"You will come too, Mr Bell?" Anderson said, turning to him.

"With pleasure," replied Percy.

"And after seeing the jewels, Mrs Stainer, will you bring the two girls back to lunch? I will join you later on, as I have business elsewhere."

Mrs Stainer expressed herself delighted with the arrangement.

A little later, the party drove down the dusty Mount Road and stopped at Storr's. They were conducted into an inner room, which contained several strong iron safes. One of these was unlocked, and several cases were brought out. These, on being

opened, displayed the most marvellous sets of emeralds, rubies, and diamonds. They were worth thousands of pounds.

Anderson glanced at his daughter, and was satisfied with the expression of real delight that he saw on her face. She took the precious gems in her hands with a loving touch, as though they were tender living creatures. She held them to the light, turned them till they scintillated with a wonderful brilliancy; then she threw them about her fair neck, and arms, and hair, as though they were her natural toys and playthings.

Percy watched her keenly. This love of jewellery, which he had noticed before, was not pleasing to him. It accorded ill with the graceful refinement and cultivation of her mind. It was a step downwards in his estimation; yet he could not but admit that the gems became her royally, and that she looked a veritable queen.

Anderson expressed himself well-pleased with the cutting and setting of the jewels, and gazed with pride at his daughter as she handled them.

"Where did you get all these stones?" asked Percy.

"I have been picking them up ever since I left my little girl in England. When I parted from her, she asked me to buy her some pretty beads at Malta, and keep them

safe for her till she returned. The notion of collecting 'pretty beads' for my daughter pleased me, but it took this form. Some of these gems have histories. Now, here is a diamond, which I have had set as an earring. It was the centre stone in the miniature crown that encircled the head of a wooden idol, belonging to a certain rich Hindu family. The descendants of that family became poor, and were only too glad to sell me the stone at a fair price. It is replaced now by a crystal, which, being properly cut, sparkles far more than this gem did in the rough. Messrs Storr have cut and set this diamond for me, and its original owners would not know it. I had the greatest difficulty in getting a fellow to it."

Anderson picked up the other earring, whilst the party crowded round him, and listened with interest to his account.

"This stone was found by a coolie, who was building the mud wall of a hut in the Bellary district. For several days he passed it by; but at last the sun caught it, and he saw it glitter. It was no better than a piece of glass to look at; but the man knew that glass was not a likely thing to appear in the mud that formed those walls. He also remembered that diamonds were to be found in that district. He accordingly picked the stone out, and tied it into a corner of his well-worn turban cloth. When

the work he was engaged upon was finished, he quietly left the neighbourhood, and went to Tanjore. He offered the stone for sale to the Princess, but she would not give him his price. He was advised to bring it to me. Needless to say, we soon came to terms; the man went away delighted, and I have had every reason to be well pleased with my bargain."

Zelma, who showed herself intensely interested in what her father was saying, picked up a coil of large pearls, made of some ten or twelve strings. The pearls were the size of peas, beautifully formed, and of perfect purity. She hung them caressingly against the delicate pink of her cheek, and asked him where he got them.

"Those came from the Ranee of Puducotta, that strange country of the thief-caste, where every man, woman, and child, from rajah to sweeper, is a thief by birth and by religion. It is in the very heart of our district, and each of us, householders, has to receive a Puducotta man into our service, and pay him wages to watch that his own people may not rob us. I dare say these pearls were originally stolen."

"How was it that the Ranee was willing to sell them? I thought that Indian ladies guarded their treasures so jealously," said Percy.

"She imagined that the necklace was

unlucky, as some ancestress had died of cholera whilst it was clasped upon her neck. She said that she herself had had no son because she had worn it; to avert future evil, she wished to get rid of it."

"She should have paid you to take it, if she thought that a curse went with it," said Minnie, laughing.

"The lady was much too shrewd a woman of business for that. I gave her a good price for it; so I hope that the curse has not been passed on with the necklace."

Bracelets, rings, earrings, necklets, bangles, strangely-shaped brooches and pendants, pins, and head-ornaments were examined, one after another. All were arranged in new morocco satin-lined cases; and all had been re-set with an artist's care and taste. It was a collection of gems fit for an Empress.

"Here is the strangest gem of all, called an Alexandrite," said Anderson, taking up an emerald pendant; the centre stone was large, and of a dull dead olive green. "This is the stone which the natives say is like their god, the destroyer. It sleeps during the day, but wakes at night, to flash fire. You see that it is a dull green now. We will take it into a dark corner, and look at it by the light of that little lamp over there."

They all moved into the shade, and the lamp was placed so as to throw a light upon it. Immediately the rays touched it, its dull green changed into a living crimson, and the stone seemed to shine with a hidden fire of its own.

"We shall have to keep this safe under lock and key, or it will find its way to some temple, where it will form the eye of a Vishnu or Siva. When you wear it, Zelma, I shall have to give you a trusty bodyguard of peons, to see that you are not robbed," said Anderson, with a smile.

They met again at lunch. It was a pleasant meal, and they lingered at the table, it being their last together.

"We shall have the pleasure of seeing you at Trichinopoly before long," said Anderson.

"I am afraid that it will not be quite so soon as I expected. Mr Fuller does not intend, I hear, to take leave just yet," replied Percy. "It may be a year before I have the pleasure of meeting you all again."

He addressed the merchant, but he looked at the daughter. He was disappointed at what he read in Zelma's face. Not a look, not a word escaped her, that he could construe into the smallest expression of chagrin. Although he had no intention of marrying her, he would have liked to have seen some small sign of

regret, some concern at their parting; for she had assuredly found in him a congenial friend, a pleasant companion; and she had aroused in him no common interest. His vanity was hurt as he saw too plainly that her heart was untouched; the new-found father filled every corner of it, and absorbed all her affections.

It was the warm-hearted Minnie who expressed the regret he fain would have seen in the other. She lamented that they would have to wait a whole year before they would see him again.

The feeling of blank disappointment increased as he listened, though he smiled pleasantly at Minnie. Mingling with the disappointment came a consciousness that he was not appreciated, and that Zelma had failed in appraising the true value of his friendship. He did not take into consideration the fact that the girl had had absolutely no experience of the world outside her school life. She had met no young men; and, generalising from this first specimen, she came to the conclusion that he was only one amongst many such that she would meet. It was impossible for her to know at present that Percy was far superior to the average specimen of young men; that he possessed a rare and delicate instinct, combined with a high sense of honour; that in intellect and mental capabilities he

largely excelled. Had she had more experience of others, she might perhaps have regarded Percy as one worthy of more than a passing thought; and have appreciated more fully the friendship which had already begun between them.

Adieux were said, and Percy watched them drive away from the hotel with mixed feelings. The carriage disappeared, he turned back into the verandah, and flung himself in a long-armed chair. He called for his servant to bring him a cheroot. As he lighted it, he gave the man various orders about their departure on the morrow. Percy Bell's holiday was over, and hard work was the order of the day.

CHAPTER IX.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

"In the mango sprays,
The sunbirds flashed; alone at his green forge
Toiled the loud coppersmith; bee-eaters hawked
Chasing the purple butterflies; beneath,
Striped squirrels raced, the mynas perked and picked,
The nine brown sisters chattered in the thorn,
The pied fish-tiger hung above the pool,
The egrets stalked among the buffaloes,
The kites sailed circles in the golden air."

EDWIN ARNOLD.

THERE is a strange mixture of the foreign and the homely in an Indian railway station. The whistling of the engines, the creaking of the brakes, the puff and hiss of the white steam, the familiar bell and guard's whistle, are all sounds which carry the traveller back to the old country, and make him think that he is at home.

But, as his eye wanders over the motley group of passengers crowding into the third-class compartments, the illusion vanishes, and he recognises the fact that he is in a foreign country.

Whole families of Hindus seem on the wing. There is the lord and master stalk-

ing ahead, leading his naked little son by the hand. The child is heavily laden with jewels; his brown skin is soft and glossy with the oil bath of yesterday. Following close behind, each laden with a shapeless bundle tied in a coloured cloth, come the younger women of the family, chattering volubly, staring at everything and everybody with childish curiosity, and heedlessly running into passers-by.

The aged grandmother brings up the rear, also staggering under a heavy burden of properties, possibly the jewels and lotas most highly prized by the family. She is very ugly and unlovable-looking in her old age. She wears no jewels; her hair is rough and untidy; her saree is old and dirty. Yet it is *her* voice that rules the family. It is *her* strident tongue that drives the youthful husband from his girlish bride; it is *her* hand that sends the weeping maiden into her lonely chamber with blow and bitter word. It is *she* who denies the young mother the companionship of her children; it is *her* mouth that utters the low obscene expressions which blunt the moral nature of the little ones beneath her son's roof. By the time-honoured custom of ages, the grandmother and mother-in-law rule the domestic hearth with a rod of iron in all the superstition and ignorance of uneducated humanity. None of the travellers

heed the old woman as she toils in their rear; yet they bow in abject obedience before *her* decrees in the bosom of their family.

Yonder stands a group of Affghans. They come from the far north, and have been months on the journey, driving before them a herd of small mountain horses. Their horses are sold, and they are going further south still, visiting the larger towns to buy wares which will find a ready market in their own land. They will push their way to the pearl fishery on the Ceylon coast, and will speculate in the unsavoury oyster* before they turn their faces north again. They are tall, strong, sinewy men, fairer than the Tamils about them. But they have a sinister expression of countenance; and any contradiction or ruffling of temper sends the long, claw-like, dirty fingers to the handle of the sharp knife hidden beneath the cloth.

Here is a party of Eurasians. They are actually darker than the Brahmins in complexion, they have thick lips, black beady eyes, and glossy hair. The women are much over-dressed, and the colours they have chosen are startlingly bright. Two of the girls are arrayed in bright purple frocks, trimmed with white lace. An elderly

* The oyster has to rot before the pearls are searched for.

woman, enormously stout, is dressed in crimson satin; the men belonging to the party are clad in tweeds of the most pronounced pattern. They speak English with a strange, foreign accent, and they assume a lordly tone to the dirty but active old native who is their servant, and has come to see them off. These are the kind of people that Percy pictured in his mind when Minnie first spoke of her friend. He knew the race as it had presented itself to him, and he had imagined Minnie's friend to be weak-willed, weak-minded, wanting in moral backbone, full of childish pride and vanity, delighting in outward show; but, withal, kindly, sympathetic, gentle, and warm-hearted.

Pushing their way through the crowd of natives, who readily stand aside, come two belted peons, followed by coolies with luggage. A first-class compartment is opened, and the luggage stowed away under the berth-like, broad leather couches. A lunch-basket and earthenware water-bottle are placed conveniently within reach. Five minutes before the train starts, two English gentlemen saunter up and get into the carriage. The coolies are paid and ordered off by the lordly peons, who stand at the door, attentive to the slighest wish on the part of their masters.

When Anderson and the three ladies

arrived at the railway station, they found the carriage ready for them. It contained two compartments fitted out like Pullman cars.

The crowd of third-class passengers hurried backwards and forwards till the last minute; the Eurasian guard pushed the people unceremoniously into carriages that already seemed full of vociferous men and women, the engine, with its great caged chimney and cowcatcher, moved slowly out of the station, and steamed towards the setting sun.

The travellers had a tedious night journey before them. They dined at Arconum, and after dinner settled themselves as comfortably as they could for the night in their respective compartments.

The roar of the train filled Zelma's ears, and she could not sleep. The thought that she was so soon to see her home was disturbing, and made her brain busy with old memories. Occasionally she roused herself to look out of the window. There was no moon, and the lamplight in the carriage made the night seem blacker than it really was. Sometimes they rushed by groves of cocoanut palms, the graceful fronds of which stood out against the steely sky. Myriads of fireflies danced in the foliage, living sparks of intermittent light. But, ere her eyes rested upon the scene, it was passed.

Later on she could distinguish great rocky

hills, rising in inky blackness against the sky. She missed the lights of the English towns, the sociable rows of lamps, and the pleasant glare from window and open door. Here and there she detected the faint flicker of a small wood fire by some hut, round which the simple-minded agriculturist and his family were taking their evening meal. As the night wore on the fires disappeared, and the train seemed passing through an uninhabited land. She could imagine the tiger and the bear prowling in the mango and tamarind topes, in search of cow and goat. But it was all imagination. No wild animal larger than the jackal haunted that part of the country. The only thing to be feared, if the traveller trod the road, would be the cobra; the deadly reptile found a congenial home in the interminable aloe fence which bordered the line.

During the small hours of the morning, Zelma dropped off into an uneasy slumber, which was broken now and then by the stoppage of the train at dimly-lighted way-side stations.

At dawn, she was awakened by the rumbling of the heavy carriages as they passed over a long bridge. She looked out and saw the waters of the Cauvery gleaming below, as they reflected the pearly grey of the sky. Great water-worn boulders reared their smooth heads out of the stream, look-

ing cold and black in the half light. Soon the Indian sun would touch the horizon, the blackness would vanish, and colour would be spread over rock, and stream, and bank. The tufts of pampas-grass, the great reeds and rushes, the velvet-leaved arums that now looked so grey and dull, would all awake into various tints, delicate and vivid, under his magic rays.

The passage over the bridge was the signal for the travellers to arouse themselves, and make a hasty toilette; the train stopped at the Erode junction, and Zelma felt that she was nearing home. The morning air was fresh and cool, and the sun, which rises so quickly in the tropics, was just throwing his rosy beams over the hills in the distance.

The Trichinopoly train started from the other side. After a hasty breakfast, they crossed over, and Zelma noticed that her father was well-known to the native officials belonging to the line. Stationmaster, clerks, and porters salaamed to the merchant as he moved by them. Humanity is much the same, whether its colour is black or white; a rich man commands the consideration, if not the respect, of the less fortunate and less affluent. Anderson was known to be enormously wealthy. Many of the trucks on the line bore his name; they never stood idle, but were always carrying cotton, rice, chillies, sugar-cane, or grain of different

kinds. He had agents all down the line, from Erode to Tuticorin, and the men in his employ numbered some hundreds.

Money is power, especially in the East, and Donald Anderson reigned like a rajah over the ryots and cultivators of the South. He gave them money to cultivate with; they gave him their crops at a reasonable price, and repaid the loans out of that price with a moderate rate of interest. No wonder that they fell down and worshipped the man through whom they could make their land yield its three crops in the year. They regarded him as a benefactor as well as a power, and Zelma was astonished at the almost royal recognition that he met with on all sides.

As they sped along in the morning light, they could see the rich country that lay around them. Miles and miles of green rice-fields stretched away right and left. Here and there they caught a glimpse of the shining waters of the Cauvery, as it slowly crept down its broad, sandy bed toward Trichinopoly and Tanjore. Its yellow waters trickled away right and left by numerous channels, to fill tanks and reservoirs, and to water acres and acres of land. Some of the channels were like small rivers. Their banks were overhung with oleander, tufted with carmine blossoms; or they were fringed with bullrush, arums, and pampas-grass. Here and there a mass

of rich green creepers matted the bushes together into an impenetrable mass, and the tailor-birds, secure in the thickness of the jungle, hung their quaint, bottle-shaped grass nests to the topmost boughs waving above. Herds of buffaloes wallowed in the streams, leaving nothing out of the water for the benefit of the flies but their noses, eyes, and horns. Black goats jumped about among the thorn bushes, tended by tiny herdsmen, youthful, happy, and naked; these basked in the hot morning sun, and played at being rajahs, by pretending to feast off imaginary curries and fruit. Butterflies of gold and green, purple and scarlet, flitted about in the bright morning light with strong, bird-like flight, or sat with opening wings on the crimson lotus, that lay on the bosom of the still pool and swamp. Bright-plumaged birds—the turquoise roller, the large king-fisher, the white egret, the long-tailed honey-sucker, the noisy green parrot, the babbling love-bird—dashed about over channel and field, bank and bush, in search of their morning meal, unheeding the big labouring engine with its rumbling train of carriages.

Minnie gazed and gazed upon the tropical scenery with a never-wearying wonder; she expressed her delight in all she saw, and would not have taken her eyes from the window if she had not been dazzled by the

glare. It was necessary at last to rest her blinded sight.

Zelma, leaning back in the broad couch, also gazed dreamily out of the window, but it was with no idle or curious look that her eyes swept over the landscape. It was but the renewing of a sweet familiarity with nature, from which she had been so long shut off by the fogs and chilly winds of the English climate. For ten long years she had pined to see those gorgeously-coloured birds and butterflies, as they flitted over the oleander and the lotus. Her eye had longed for a sight of the emerald stretches of paddy-field, the broad-leaved plantains, and the groves of stately palms. Her ear had listened in vain for the whirring of the cicala, the metallic croak of the tree frog, and the scream of the parrot as he darted with swift flight from tree to tree. Here they were, those dear old scenes and sounds so familiar in her childhood; once more they rejoiced her eye in all the wealth and redundancy of nature.

A feeling of sublime happiness filled her soul as she realised the glorious fact that she was awake once more in the heart of India. She gazed at the passing scenes with a little restful sigh of content. It was as though her life was complete, and nothing more was needed to make it perfect.

As the morning advanced, the heat in-

creased, and Minnie showed signs of being wearied. The contents of a lunch basket were discussed, with brimming glasses of claret and soda water.

Towards mid-day Anderson put his head out of the window.

"You will soon be at the end of your journey, Miss Beaumont," he said, by way of consolation. "See, there is the Rock, the great temple rock, which stands in the centre of our town."

Zelma jumped up from her seat, where she had been dreaming.

"Where, father? Oh, where?"

"Over there, my child; just above that belt of cocoanuts."

"Ah, how it all comes back to me. Did we not once go to the top?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, more than once, I fancy. Your mother often went. She said the fresh air at the top was well worth the climb."

"There is a little temple on the top, with a hideous image of the elephant god. I remember it so well. My mother once gave me a wreath of jasmine flowers, which I carried up myself, and the ayah placed it round the neck of the idol. I laughed and called the image ugly, and I tried to snatch away my precious flowers. But the ayah would not let me; she said that the god would be angry if I laughed at him,

for he was the children's god. Mother, too, looked serious, and told me not to laugh."

The subject did not please Anderson, and Mrs Stainer perceived it. He thought for the first time in his life how little he had done for the mental elevation of the mother; and how little he had tried to draw her away from the influences of the heathen superstitions in which she was born. The idea of that fair child before him having ever been led up to an idol to place a wreath upon its neck — a common form of adoration and worship amongst the heathen — filled him with horror. He again doubted whether he was doing right in bringing the mother and daughter together.

Whilst Anderson remained silent, and Mrs Stainer hesitated, not knowing exactly how to give the conversation a turn, the voluble tongue of Minnie broke in,—

"Oh, did you really go into the temples and see the idols? How I should like to see them too! They must be so strange, so weird. One has so often heard of the poor heathen, who 'bow down to wood and stone,' but to see them would be intensely interesting, especially if they were actually bowing down to their images."

"Do you think so?" said Anderson indifferently. "I cannot see anything very interesting in their doings. In many ways

their religion is suited to their mental capacity; it is made up chiefly of fireworks, tom-toms, and gaudy tinsel shows."

Mrs Stainer did not like the tone in which this was said; she rejoined, with more fervour than generally marked her gentle speech,—

"Idolatry in any nation is degrading and hideous. There is not a single redeeming feature about the real thing as it is practised out here. In theory its philosophy may be highly moral and virtuous, but theory is one thing, and practice is another."

Mrs Stainer spoke in a low, earnest tone, chiefly addressing herself to the girls. It was doubtful if Anderson heard her, for he was busy with his handbag, putting up a book and some papers which he had been reading on the way.

Zelma looked surprised at Mrs Stainer's words, and would have replied, had not her father's voice interrupted her.

"Now, Zelma, we must begin to put our traps together, for the carriage meets us at the Fort station."

"My husband will be at the Fort too, and so will Colonel and Mrs Beaumont," said Mrs Stainer.

"Am I to go straight off with my uncle and aunt?" asked Minnie, with an accent of dismay at the prospect of so soon parting with her travelling companions.

"They will be ready to carry you back with them. They have been looking forward so much to your coming for some time past, as they made up their minds long ago to offer you a home if Colonel Beaumont was not ordered away on active service," said Mrs Stainer, touched at the girl's regret at parting from her.

"But I shall be so sorry to leave you, Mrs Stainer, and Zelma," replied Minnie, and there were actually tears in her bright blue eyes.

"I shall be living close to you, and so will Zelma. I am sure we shall often meet," said Mrs Stainer consolingly.

"You shall see Zelma as often as you like," said Anderson. "We all live within easy reach of each other, and the ladies gather every evening at the club, or the tennis-courts, or both."

"Where I hope we shall see you occasionally, now that you have a daughter to bring out," said Mrs Stainer.

Anderson smiled, but made no promise. He had hitherto kept aloof from his neighbours.

"Then it is hardly like saying good-bye," said Minnie, regaining her brightness.

"We never say 'good-bye' in Trichinopoly unless we are leaving the station; we always wish each other 'good-night' and 'good-morning,' as we did on board ship; for we

are quite certain we shall all meet again the next day," replied Mrs Stainer.

The train drew up in the large busy station, and poured its load of travellers out upon the platform. Anderson opened the door of the carriage and stepped down, almost jumping into the arms of the Reverend John Stainer as he did so. The gentle, grey-haired missionary was robed in a long white cassock of spotless calico, and round his waist was coiled three or four strands of black cord.

"See, I have brought you your wife safe and sound, and looking ten years younger for her trip home. This is my daughter," he said, as Zelma got out and stood by her father.

There was a ring of pride in his tone as he said the words; the clergyman noted it, and congratulated him warmly as he shook him by the hand.

"Is Colonel Beaumont here?" asked Mrs Stainer of her husband.

"Yes, and Mrs Beaumont too. I passed them on my way. Ah! here they come."

Minnie saw them too, and, recognising her aunt, whom she had not seen for four years, she ran down the platform to meet her, colliding here and there with a heedless passenger carrying the ubiquitous bundle. She stood on no ceremony, but rushed straight into her aunt's arms, "like a fresh

rose from old England," said her uncle. Mrs Stainer felt satisfied, after this little scene, that there would be no more regrets at parting.

After a few words of greeting on both sides, they separated to find their luggage.

Minnie, full of curiosity, drew Zelma towards the gateway that led outside.

"Let us go and look at the people outside, and get a view of the old rock."

Their way was barred for a moment by the words,—

"Tickets, please, miss."

The familiar sound seemed to transport both the young travellers back to England again for a moment.

"Mr Anderson has them," said Zelma.

The Hindu railway official looked at her curiously, and stood aside to let her pass.

"What a lovely carriage! and what beautiful horses!" exclaimed Minnie, as her eye fell on a magnificent pair of black "walers" and a handsome brougham. The brass mounts of the black harness shone like gold, and the two horse-keepers, or syces, dressed in black and yellow, harmonised with the steeds. They stood at the animals' heads, waving their long chowries of horse-hair over the glossy black coats of the horses to keep off the flies. At the carriage door were two belted peons with silver badges bearing Anderson's name.

One of the peons was an old man of dignified appearance; he wore a white beard, and a large black and gold turban. He looked sharply into the girls' faces as they came out of the station; and, stepping forward, he made a low salaam to Zelma, touching the ground at her feet with his hands before lifting them to his forehead.

"It is old Abdool!" she exclaimed.

The man, hearing his name, began to speak volubly in his own tongue.

"Does he remember you?" asked Minnie.

"Yes, and I remember him well. He used to attend me as a child when I was out walking or driving. If I only set foot beyond the verandah, the faithful Abdool was always there, watchful and ready, to accompany me, to see that I fell into no mischief. I must ask my father to let me have him again for my special servant. It will seem like old times to have Abdool at my heels once more," said Zelma, with a pleased smile. She had laid her hand gently on the turbanned old head, as it bent before her so humbly; and the old man went back to his place at the carriage door with tears of joy in his eyes.

Beyond this handsome, well-appointed turn-out was the less pretentious one-horse phaeton of the missionary, and the four-wheeled gharry of the Beaumonts. A crowd of natives stood round, gazing idly at the

new arrivals. Many of them knew that Zelma was the daughter of Anderson, the wealthy merchant, and of his native wife. They stared at her with the same curiosity as had moved the clerk at the gate. In the depth of their hearts, they regarded her birth with scorn, for a Christian marriage was no marriage in their eyes for a Brahmin woman.

But they also knew that, in her father's eyes, her birth was legitimate, and that she would inherit all his riches; therefore, though they scorned her birth, they were abjectly humble before her wealth. They knew her mother well, for they had seen her often at the temple, when, dropping to their own level, she mingled with them as a fellow-worshipper of the hideous ghee-anointed image. As they gazed at the girl, they were struck with her fairness, her ivory skin, her wealth of brown gold hair, and her handsome European dress; they found it difficult to associate this peerless daughter with the superstitious Brahmin mother.

Minnie had not many moments to stare about her. Zelma's father came out of the station and asked if she was ready.

"The luggage will follow us. Get in, my dear, and let us make way for the others. You need not say 'good-bye,' for I have promised to take you to dine this evening at Colonel Beaumont's. We shall meet Mrs Stainer there."

Father and daughter stepped into the carriage, and the black horses dashed off.

"This is your own carriage, Zelma; I had it built on purpose for you. The horses are quiet enough, though they go so fast. You must learn to drive them yourself in another carriage I have also bought for you."

What girl could fail to be pleased with such gifts as her father was showering down upon her? It was like coming home to Fairyland, or an enchanted palace. Zelma expressed herself pleased, and Anderson read the genuine delight of appreciative youth in her eyes.

"But, father, I want to ask you, now that we are alone, about mother. Will she go out with me and have me with her as a companion?"

It was a difficult question for Anderson to answer. His wife lived such a different life from that of a European; unless the girl saw it with her own eyes, she could not comprehend the impossibility of there being any family intercourse amongst them. Mrs Anderson had an establishment of her own, composed of Brahmin servants; and, since the restitution of her caste, she had adhered rigorously to all caste rules. Anderson knew that his daughter must be disappointed, and he hoped that she would turn to him, and find in him what she would miss so

terribly in her mother. The thought that she would depend on him for the companionship that a girl usually expects to find in her mother drew him still more towards her. He replied, after a moment's hesitation,—

"Most girls, when they come out to India, are taken by their mothers to call on their friends and acquaintances; but with you, I am afraid, it must be different. Your mother has no friends among the Europeans, and shrinks from seeing any strangers. Mrs Beaumont promised that she would take you under her wing, and be a mother to you. But I am afraid that you will sometimes find yourself standing alone."

"I am well able to take care of myself, father," she cried, smiling at him with all the confidence of youth. "You shall go out out with me instead of mother; you shall teach me to drive and ride; we shall have such a happy time together, you and I."

Anderson looked at his daughter with eyes full of love. It was inexpressibly sweet to the middle-aged man, who had led so lonely and absorbed an existence, to meet with this spontaneous affection, the pure bright friendship, which was so naturally offered. It spread a glow of happiness over his soul, such as a husband feels in the companionship of a sympathetic

wife, and such as Anderson had never felt in his married life. It awoke in his breast the old chivalry which had so long slumbered; whilst there sprang up in the daughter's, enthusiasm and devotion amounting almost to hero-worship. The separation had been just sufficient to make her idealise the unfamiliar father.

Anderson lifted his heart to Heaven in that wordless gratitude which flashes from the created to the Creator; and he thanked God for giving him such a daughter, and for the happiness which was so suddenly and so unexpectedly shed around him.

As they talked thus brightly of the future, the carriage was rapidly approaching the journey's end. The passage through the crowded streets was not easy. Here and there a bullock-cart barred the way, or burdened coolies toiled along in imminent danger of being run over. The horsekeepers were fleet of foot, and, hurrying on in front, they hustled cart and heedless foot-passenger aside; then, dropping behind, they nimbly caught the leather strap hanging from the roof, and swung themselves on to the footboard behind the carriage. On they rolled, past dusty shops, exposing wares in uninviting dinginess to the open street: stalls of sweetmeats covered with flies; small dens crowded with buyers of ghee and curry-stuffs; dirty

little shops piled with bags of different grains; dust-laden stores of tinware, earthenware, bamboo-work, glass bangles, and bright-coloured cotton cloths.

Zelma had had no eye for the bazaar; she had been too deeply interested in the conversation; too charmed at finding herself in sole possession of the dear father.

Presently they left the narrow streets, and bowled along a broader road, shaded by rows of acacias. The carriage gave a sudden turn, and they entered into private grounds which were almost park-like in appearance. The rough spear-grass which overspread the ground took the place of the fine turf of old England. Large many-stemmed banyans, with their dark glossy green leaves, stood like oaks about the open space. Round the house clustered beautiful groups of tamarinds, in shape like the graceful sycamore, clothed with the finest tenderest foliage of oval acacia-like leaves.

"Home?" said Zelma.

"I trust you may find it so, my darling," was the loving reply.

Not a word more was uttered till the carriage drew up under the wide portico, before the deep pillared verandah.

A row of white-robed servants stood in the large entrance hall, eagerly awaiting the coming of the young mistress. With quick Oriental intuition they guessed that

she would soon rule the house and its master.

The old butler came forward with the usual low salaam, and welcomed the daughter of the house. His obeisance was a signal to the others, and Zelma felt as though she were a princess returning to her palace. She was in no way embarrassed; it all seemed natural and befitting, recalling childhood's scenes.

She walked down the hall, in the centre of which played the fountain. Right and left were the clerks from the office; she was met by the head clerk, the very man who had educated her mother. He was dressed like the rest in spotless white, and on his head he wore a turban of the finest white muslin, ornamented with a broad band of gold. He carried a wreath of jasmine and white oleander flowers in his hand. This he placed over the girl's neck, and in her hand he laid a lime* of pure gold. Its weight bowed down the fair hand that took it. Such a gift was not permissible to any Government official, but Donald Anderson was independent of all rule, and the acceptance and bestowal of gifts entered largely into the routine of his life. The head clerk and secretary said a few words of welcome, which Zelma gracefully ac-

* The presentation of a fresh lime is a common form of greeting amongst the Hindus.

knowledged. Then, seeing some women hanging back shyly, she went towards them.

Her mother was not there.

"Where is Mrs Anderson?" asked the girl, looking imperiously from one woman to another.

A very old Brahmin, robed in a yellow silk cloth, came forward and pointed mutely up the stairs.

Zelma went forward without a moment's hesitation, her heart beating with expectation. As she set her foot on the broad shallow staircase, with its handsome carved balusters, she looked back at her father. He was standing in the centre of the hall, watching the fair vision of brightness that seemed to fill the place with her beauty.

"What time is lunch?" she asked.

"At two o'clock," he answered.

"All right, I shall be ready," and she sprang lightly up the steps.

"Anthony, have lunch ready at the usual time, in the large dining-room," said the master; and, turning into his private sitting-room next the office, he closed the door on the wondering crowd that had assembled to greet the young mistress.

CHAPTER X.

THE STRANGE MOTHER.

"A mother is a mother still,
The holiest thing alive."—COLERIDGE.

ZELMA waited for no guide to show her the way to her mother's apartments. Her memory was her guide. She turned to the right, where the broad staircase branched, and, following it to the top, found herself facing a heavy purdah. She pushed the curtain aside, and entered the darkened passage upon which her mother's rooms opened. It had formerly been a verandah, but it was so shut in by screens and hanging bamboo blinds, that light and air were excluded. There was a gloom and silence over the place, as though death reigned around, which struck a chill to her heart, and curbed her fiery impatience.

Her eye was barely accustomed to the dim light, when she turned into a spacious, lofty room, curtained heavily, and scented strongly with otto of rose. It was darker even than the passage. There was not

much furniture in it, but the floor was covered with the finest grass matting; and here and there a rich thick Persian rug was spread.

At the end of the room, furthest from the door, reclined a handsome woman of middle age; large square satin pillows, stuffed with the softest silk cotton, supported her rounded form. A double punkah waved slowly to and fro overhead, but the woman seemed to feel the heat in spite of the punkah and the cool, darkened room; she fanned herself languidly with an enormous fan of ostrich feathers. It served the double purpose of cooling her and brushing away the mosquitoes, which, loving dim corners and the retirement of drapery folds, swarmed everywhere.

As Zelma entered the room, the native lady rose slowly to her feet, and, with a cry, held out her arms to the advancing figure.

"Ahmonee! my daughter! my little one! darling! my queen! my jewel!"

The words poured from the impassioned lips of the mother in a torrent of endearing terms. Now and then she relapsed into her own language, but the English came as readily as the Tamil. Then she kissed the girl on her cheeks and hair, and softly passed her smooth palms over the young face and brow.

Zelma gently withdrew herself and stood

before her mother; she turned to the little light that fell from the wide doorways.

"Am I not grown, mother?" she said smiling.

"Ah! grown, indeed! and without the mother by her child's side to give a blessing with each day's growth!"

"But I am glad father took me to England. I have learnt so much. Such a clever mother should have a clever daughter," and she laid a caressing hand on her mother's shoulder.

Again the woman caught her hand and kissed it passionately.

"It was cruel, cruel, to rob me of my child!" she cried, as though her heart still ached under the one grief of her life.

"Never mind! Here I am home again; and now we are all going to be very happy together," said Zelma, soothingly and brightly.

The old woman, who had followed more slowly upstairs, entered and came up to them. She looked Zelma all over with a deliberate gaze, an examination which appeared rude and intrusive to the girl. As she looked, she began to talk rapidly to the mother in a low tone. She was making a commentary on Zelma's appearance in her own language.

Mrs Anderson listened with pleasure, but not so Zelma. She drew herself proudly

away as the old creature began to finger her diamonds, and the gold bands that encircled her wrists.

"Who is this old woman? Is she my old ayah?" she asked.

"She is your aunt," replied Mrs Anderson, scarcely noticing the girl's tone.

"My aunt! I hardly understand you, mother."

Somehow, the notion of being related to that terrible familiar old native, who, though clothed in a silk cloth, looked less trim and neat than the women-servants, offended her sense of refinement; she glanced at her with something like aversion as she uttered the words incredulously.

The old woman detected the tone in the voice, and gathered from the look that she was not pleased. She fell back with that cringing humility which the members of her race know so well how to assume, and dropped into the background. Zelma looked to her mother for an explanation.

"She is not really your aunt, but mine. You must not mind seeing some of my people now and then, Ahmonee. When they took you from me I had no one, so I sent for some of my own relations. I feed and clothe them, as every good Brahmin should do, and they serve me; but if you do not like them, they shall never come near you, or be seen by you."

The girl's heart smote her. She remem-

bered the thoughts that filled her heart as she left England, and how she had determined to know and love her mother's people. A sudden revulsion of feeling sent her straight to the old woman's side.

"Come, do not be frightened. If you are my mother's aunt, I shall like you, I am sure; I mean to like everything that belongs to my mother," and she drew her forward again.

The old lady was won in a moment, for no human being could have withstood the winning sweetness of her manners. Her mother was pleased also at her action.

"My daughter is not ashamed, then, of her mother's people?" she said caressingly.

"You must let me see them all. I want to know them, here and in their own homes. Whenever they come to visit you, they must be introduced to me."

The girl took off her hat and gloves, and glanced instinctively round for a chair. The mother did not see the daughter's glance, but the old woman did. She went away towards one of the remote corners of the room, and slowly wheeled forward a chair, which had the appearance of having been seldom used, and seldom dusted. This she placed close to Zelma, and signed to her to sit down. The girl dropped into it easily, and the mother took up her position on her cushions again.

Zelma's attention wandered from the occupants of the room to the room itself. She missed the drawing-room tables and ornaments, the pictures, brackets, and, above all, the flowers with which the Englishwoman loves to surround herself. The darkness was so great as to prevent any possibility of reading and working. She became conscious of a sinking of the spirits, as disappointment crept into her soul. Her eye was quick to take in the fact that this would prove no harbour of refuge and retirement for herself. There was no snug corner where, with her work or book, she might settle herself down for a morning of reading or talking with her mother.

"Did you come out with the missionary's wife?" asked Mrs Anderson, whose eyes, accustomed to the dim light, were fastened greedily upon her daughter, devouring every detail in her appearance.

"Yes, and she was so kind. One of my schoolfellows was also with me, Colonel Beaumont's niece."

"Is she pretty?"

"She can hardly be called pretty, but she is certainly the most good-natured, kind-hearted girl I ever met, which is better than being pretty."

"Is she rich? has she plenty of jewels?"

What strange questions her mother asked; they were almost childish.

"No, she is not rich; I hope to see a great deal of her, and am so glad that she is living within reach," she replied.

Her mother looked up quickly, and said a little sharply,—

"Do you think she will have anything more to do with you when she finds that you have a native mother?"

The tone of momentary bitterness distressed Zelma.

"It can make no difference; she knows already, and has known for a long time, that you are a native lady."

"Ah, well, we shall see."

The expression "native lady" salved the wound; but a more experienced person would have known, by the little hopeless sigh that followed, that Mrs Anderson had but small hopes of her daughter being received by the Europeans of the place.

After a pause she said,—

"The English do not understand us; and though they pretend to respect our castes, they think in the depth of their hearts that we are as dust beneath their feet. As my child you will be scouted, but as your father's you may be received. It is unfortunate that he has made no effort to gain friends amongst his own people. His whole mind is given to the office."

All this was uttered in a gentle, resigned

tone. The bitterness got no further than the speech; the vexation only flashed momentarily from the eyes.

At this moment a woman servant came in and whispered some words in her ear. There was a certain familiarity in the action which does not usually exist between English mistresses and maids, and again Zelma felt annoyed.

"Your father says he is coming up to see me," said Mrs Anderson, placidly raising herself from her cushions.

The woman who brought the message drew back the heavy striped curtains, rolled up the thick bamboo blinds, and let in a flood of welcome light. She then pushed up a few chairs that were scattered to the four corners of the room, and grouped them where the light fell; Mrs Anderson seated herself in one of them.

Zelma looked on in amazement.

"Does my father always send word when he is coming to see you?" she asked.

"Always; and then we are ready to receive him. He loves plenty of light, and also likes me to be seated in a chair. He never stays long, and it is very unusual for him to come at this hour. I suppose it is because you are here."

Now that the curtains were drawn, Zelma had an opportunity of seeing better what her mother was like.

She was still very handsome, though she could never have been so beautiful as the daughter. The delicacy and regularity of feature were lost in the stoutness of middle-age; self-indulgence was stamped upon face and figure; her eyes had no longer the intellectual look which had once charmed Donald; they were now sleepy with stagnated thought, or opened wide in simple, childlike curiosity. Her fat, rounded arms were laden with bangles; her feet were bare, and her ankles heavy with golden circlets; upon her toes gleamed jewelled rings. Her figure was swathed in the graceful folds of a rich, soft, claret-coloured silk saree, deeply bordered with gold embroidery, which enhanced the pale olive complexion of her skin. Her hair was black, and neatly coiled into the knot which all Tamil women wear, whatever may be their caste. Two large gold bosses ornamented her head; and round her neck hung strings of pearls and a massive necklace of gold coins.

Looking at the strange figure before her, Zelma found it difficult to believe that she could be her mother. At present she could find nothing that they shared in common. The past was blotted out by the strangeness and incongruity of the present. If she had never left her mother's side, the familiarity of growing girlhood would have

enabled her to see in the Brahmin lady before her, a parent who had crooned over her as a baby, and soothed and petted her as she emerged from helpless babyhood into independent childhood. But the mother had been removed from her life, and the ideal that she had formed of her in her absence was utterly unlike the reality with which Zelma was now confronted. Her heart sank, as each moment that passed made it more difficult for her to feel at home.

Her eye wandered restlessly round the room. It looked comfortable in a way, but there was an untidy, neglected appearance about it which offended her fastidious taste. It wanted the housemaid's brush and duster; there were two or three handsome brass vessels standing about, looking out of place in a lady's drawing-room, as they were intended for kitchen use, and not for ornament. Some silk and muslin clothes were on the floor, which should have been stowed away in a wardrobe. There was no sign of refined feminine occupation anywhere. Books, magazines, and newspapers were absent. Workbaskets, music, the familiar inkstand, with its accompanying blotter and pens, found no place there. The same indolence that marked the mother extended itself to her surroundings; to Zelma, life under such conditions would be unendur-

able. She made an effort to keep her eyes off the imperfections of the room, and let them rest upon the mother, who, whatever else she might be, was full of love and tenderness for the daughter. But after a while the conversation flagged; Mrs Anderson dropped into monosyllables, and showed signs of being wearied. She would have been quite contented to have sat there watching Zelma, whether the girl talked or not, luxuriating in the simple pleasure of seeing her once more.

But Zelma was a bad hand at sheer idling. Thoughts and hands must both be busy; and if her mother could neither talk nor listen intelligently, she felt that the time had come for her to seek her own room, which at present she had not seen.

It was a real relief when her father entered. He walked up to his wife, and, leaning over her, kissed her smooth forehead.

"Are you pleased with your English daughter?" he said.

"Pleased and proud," replied the mother. "She is far more beautiful than I thought she could be, and oh! so fair, so white!"

It is a strange fact that, amongst the nations of India, fairness of skin is thought quite as much of as beauty of form and feature.

"We must make her very happy here, or

we shall have our pretty bird flying back again to the old country," said Anderson.

His wife gave him a startled look.

"She will not leave us again, will she?" she asked anxiously.

"Only for the hills, I hope," replied her husband, smiling.

"Do not be afraid, mother," said Zelma reassuringly; "I shall be in no hurry to go back to the fogs of cold grey England."

She felt happy again now that her father had joined them. His presence shed around a feeling of home at once, which dissipated the unrestful sensation that had crept over her since she entered the room.

The trio chatted on, Mrs Anderson only joining in at rare intervals when immediately addressed.

Zelma observed that her father talked to his wife with a mixture of simplicity and respect. Sometimes his language was of such simplicity as a man would use towards a child; but his tone was as chivalrous and deferential as that used by a knight to his ladylove.

"He is like one of the gallant old knights of old, this dear, chivalrous father of mine. How I shall love him! No wonder that mother sits there looking at him as though he were an archangel. I shall share her worship, I am sure."

Such were the thoughts that ran through the girl's mind.

"Have you seen your rooms?" he asked her presently.

"Not yet; where are they?"

"Come with me and I will show you. Goodbye," he said, as he again kissed his wife, who made no attempt to detain him.

Excepting for their evening walks in the garden, Anderson had never attempted to make a companion of his wife; and she was quite content that it should be so. It was sufficient for her to know that he regarded her as his legitimate wife; that she had all she needed of this world's goods, and that he had saved her from a life of shame and poverty.

As soon as father and daughter had left the room, the same woman who had arranged the furniture returned, replaced the chairs, drew the curtains and let down the blinds, till the room was reduced to its original darkness. Mrs Anderson went back to her rug and cushions on the floor; and the ancient relative crept from an inner room, where she had hidden herself out of Anderson's sight; she dropped down by the Brahmin lady's side, and talked in earnest whispers, whilst her companion listened without any sign of weariness.

Anderson led the way back through the curtained doorway, and passed along the

broad pillared passage, from which one could see into the big hall below. A purdah, corresponding to the one on the opposite side, hung in front of a doorway. Anderson drew it aside, and held it for his daughter to enter. The action was slight, but there was something in it which struck the daughter; she paused, and smiling, said, "I will follow you," but he signed to her to go on. She passed her arm in his, he dropped the curtain behind him, and they entered together.

It was a charming sitting-room, furnished with a quaint mixture of old and new; Indian and English draperies and ornaments. There were massive couches and cabinets of blackwood, handsomely carved in the same style as the rest of the furniture in the rooms downstairs, which Anderson used himself. The large doorways were draped in the latest English fashion of curtains. The floor was carpeted with rugs from the north of India. On the tables were the latest books and magazines. The walls were hung with pictures by English artists, and adorned with the finest works of Oriental art in brass, copper, and silver. By the side of the strangely-ornamented music-stand, with its shelves of entwined lotus birds, and its legs of coiled cobras, stood a grand piano.

It was a fitting bower for the beautiful

girl, in whose nature the cold north and the sunny south met and amalgamated.

Zelma exclaimed with surprise and pleasure at her charming room,—

"Who has prepared this? Did you, father—you, who are so busy, who have so little time for anything outside and beyond your office?"

"It was a pleasure to me to prepare a pretty nest for my bird. But do not thank me, child, for its prettiness. I spent very little time and thought over it. I sent for an artist in furniture from Madras, and told him exactly what I wanted. He took up the idea at once, and worked it out far more successfully than I could ever have done it."

They went into the next room, which was smaller. It was furnished as a dressing-room in just the same style; the art of the two countries of her parents blended in perfect harmony.

Beyond this was a large bedroom, and Anderson drew his daughter's attention to a speaking tube, which rested on a small table by the bed.

"This communicates with me in my room below, so that you never need feel lonely or alarmed at night. By touching this spring you will ring a little bell; I do the same below, and return your signal on this bell; then you will only have to speak."

Zelma was delighted with the arrangement.

"You will find the same apparatus in your sitting-room, which will communicate with me at my writing-table."

Anderson then struck a gong, and immediately an ayah and an elderly man-servant came into the room.

"These are your servants, whose business it will be to wait upon you. You shall also have old Abdool to pull your punkah and go errands for you. Now, my little one, I must leave you. Lunch will be ready in a few minutes; make haste with your preparations, as I am very hungry."

He turned to go, but she flung her arms round his neck. What a darling father he was! Could any girl help loving him? She forgot the strange mother at the other end of the house, and thought only of him who had suddenly become her prince, her king.

With a happy sigh Anderson left her, and went down, her kisses warm upon his cheeks. He felt a new man. There was warmth in his heart, and a joyousness in his very step, which he had never experienced before. The charm of her presence pervaded everything; even the very stairs seemed brightened by her having flitted up their broad, shallow steps.

Before she arrived, he had prepared for her coming, more from a wish that his child should be surrounded with things that befitted her position as his heiress, than with any intention of giving her pleasure, or of

arousing her affections. But she had accepted it all as a tribute of love, and repaid him accordingly. He knew that he had led a selfish life, and did not deserve all that she chose to shower upon him. It made the tribute none the less sweet that it was unexpected and undeserved. He determined that for the future he would be worthy of it all; what he did henceforth should be done for her own sweet sake, and not to satisfy his own pride.

The tiffin-gong sounded, and Zelma ran lightly down the stairs. Her father was waiting for her in the hall below; they entered the dining-room together. Like the rest of the rooms, it was handsomely furnished with the same quaintly-carved furniture. A magnificent sideboard stood at the end; above it were grouped shields and weapons—boar-spears, swords, knives, and daggers of all shapes, collected by Anderson in his many travels through the country. The room would have dined fifty people easily. Probably, in the old days, when the collector lived there, and ruled in the name of the old "John Company" like a rajah, fifty people had often gathered together in it.

Anderson and his daughter sat at a small oval table, which was almost lost in the spacious, lofty saloon.

It was an excellent meal that was put before them. Zelma ate with the enjoy-

ment of youth, talking and laughing the while. She told him of her life at school, of how the climate deadened her feelings, of the charm of the voyage, and her delight in the tropical life. He did not understand her as Percy had done, nor did he lead her on to probe and fathom her own feelings. He endeavoured to direct her thoughts to practical subjects, and made her enter minutely into descriptions of how she plied her carving tools, or how she learnt to play and sing. It rejoiced him more than a little to find that she had so many resources in herself which would make her independent in a great measure of others. He offered to procure any materials or books that she needed, tools, and even workmen to work under her direction.

"Before I take up anything in that way, I must unpack and arrange my treasures. It will take days to settle myself down," said Zelma.

"You must come to me if you want anything, or if the arrangements I have made for you upstairs are not to your liking."

Anderson got up from the table to return to the office.

"You will not forget that we dine out," he said. "I have ordered the carriage at a quarter to eight."

He turned to leave the room, but, as he reached the door, he stopped and said,—

"By-the-bye, you may as well go to your mother's room and bid her 'good-night' before you go out this evening. She will like to see you dressed, and it will be too late to go to her when we return."

She promised that she would do so. Her father lingered at the door of his office till the embroidered white frock had passed out of sight up the stairs.

Later on in the day, he heard the sounds of the piano above, and a sweet young voice raised in song. It came upon him suddenly as he sat wholly immersed in work, and forgetful of all else but the drudgery of it. It was like the song of some sweet bird. When the bulbul sang in the branches of the scarlet-flowered hybiscus just outside his window, it disturbed him not. The song of the bulbul had no power to raise the springing well of love that now mounted from his heart and filled his whole being. He waited for a pause in the music, and then touched the little electric bell of the speaking-tube. The answer came, and he sent up his message,—

"Tell Anthony to get tea ready, and I will come up for a cup."

"It shall be ready directly," came back on his ear, in Zelma's clear tones. It was but a short ten minutes snatched from his labours amongst the clerks; but it was the commencement of a custom that grew very

dear to both. No matter how busy Anderson might be, he always managed to run up to his daughter's room for his afternoon cup of tea. In those few precious moments, they often found time to make plans for the evening.

A few days after Zelma's arrival, she proposed that her mother should join them at the afternoon tea. It was a great trial to Anderson to be obliged to remind her that her mother would not eat and drink with them. A shade of disappointment passed over the girl's face, but it cleared away when Anderson told her that she must be content with her old father.

They dined at Colonel Beaumont's on the evening of this, their first day at home. Though Minnie had only been separated from Zelma for a few hours, she showed the greatest delight at meeting her again. Mrs Beaumont was a little perplexed at her niece's enthusiasm and admiration for her schoolfellow—for no one understood better than that lady the difficult position in which Anderson and his daughter were placed. It had yet to be proved whether they would be received into society. He had never introduced his wife to his friends, although, on the other hand, he had never disowned her. He had made no secret of the daughter's existence, had openly spoken of her return, and had taken it for granted

that there would be no stigma attached to her birth, though there might be some hesitation in admitting her to European society. Mrs Beaumont knew that, if by any chance the girl should prove vulgar, or exhibit any of the country-bred foibles of her race, she would be a failure socially, she would sink back into the indolent, secluded life that her mother led. Until it was seen what Zelma would do for herself, it was impossible for Mrs Beaumont to say whether the friendship between the two girls could last. She had given her invitation to Anderson, scarcely expecting that he would accept it, and it was with much curiosity that she received her guests that evening. She knew that it would decide the momentous question, as far as she herself was concerned, as to whether she would see more of the merchant's daughter, or gently let her drop into the rank of a mere acquaintance.

Mrs Beaumont and her husband were agreeably surprised at Minnie's young friend. Her perfect manners, her natural dignity, that forbade familiarity, and forced people to treat her with deference, and her personal beauty, disarmed all Mrs Beaumont's preconceived notions. She was a good-natured woman, quite willing to recognise merit where she saw it; and, before the evening ended, she was enthusiastic over her guest.

After dinner, she found an opportunity of

speaking to Anderson on the subject of calling.

"Shall I take the two girls round the cantonment, and introduce them to our friends?"

Anderson pondered over the matter for a few moments, and then said,—

"It is very good of you to offer to take Zelma; but I have made up my mind to go with her myself. In the ordinary course of events, Mrs Anderson, if she were European, would take her, but, situated as we are, such a course is out of the question. We must act as though there were no Mrs Anderson. If you will be good enough to chaperon Zelma when I am unable to do so, I shall be much obliged."

"I shall be most happy to do so," said Mrs Beaumont heartily. "I know that Minnie will be miserable unless I allow the girls to see a great deal of each other, and that will mean going about together."

"I must tell you, Mrs Beaumont, that I have quite made up my mind to mend my ways, by giving less time to the office, and more to my social duties. I am afraid that I have been very remiss in that respect hitherto," said Anderson, with a repentant sigh.

"We shall all be delighted to see more of you," replied Mrs Beaumont, in a tone that had a ring of truth about it; it was not a polite social speech that she was making. "You can surely manage, like the rest of

your fellow-men, to do your work and allow yourself some time for relaxation."

"I mean to try. And now tell me, what do you think of Zelma?"

The pride with which this question was asked was pardonable; and the answer that came to it rejoiced his heart. Mrs Beaumont was loud in her praise of his daughter's manners and looks; and he felt that the first successful step had been made.

"Then we may consider the matter settled; you will be responsible for the introduction of your daughter, and you will seek my services when you need them," said Mrs Beaumont.

"Thank you; that is exactly what I wish," replied Anderson gratefully.

She was about to move away, but her companion detained her.

"One moment; tell me, how do you think Zelma will be received?"

The shrewd Scotchman gazed into Mrs Beaumont's face with a steady look of eager inquiry. There was no means of avoiding the question, no loophole for pretty speeches which might be more pleasant than truthful. She was obliged to answer straightforwardly,—

"You wish me to speak plainly?"

"Most certainly, Mrs Beaumont; I ask the question, knowing you to be well versed in social matters; and I am sure that you

can guess pretty accurately what is Zelma's immediate future."

"She will be received with some prejudice, which it will take time to conquer. As your daughter and heiress, she has a claim to consideration from your European neighbours. Besides this, she possesess a charm of manner and person which will win her way to people's hearts in the end."

Anderson listened attentively, and the pleasure of listening was enhanced by the fact that Mrs Beaumont's opinion so nearly coincided with his own.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOREIGN COUSIN.

"And to his eye
There was but one beloved face on earth,
And that was shining on him."—BYRON.

FATHER and daughter were received with a little surprise and a good deal of curiosity, as, following the strange Anglo-Indian custom, they went round and called on all their neighbours in the middle of the day. Their cards were taken in by sedate butlers, who presently returned with the request, "Please come in;" occasionally this was varied by the words, "Missus gone out." Zelma was charmingly dressed, and her manners, as well as her appearance, struck the most prejudiced Anglo-Indian favourably.

She disarmed all coolness by her sweet gentleness; she gave herself no airs; exhibited no pretentious pride; and preserved an attitude of instinctive deference towards her elders. The ladies were one and all obliged to confess that Miss Anderson was an acquisition to the station; and that no

girl could fill the difficult position she occupied with more grace or dignity.

Miss Benson received a grateful letter, which was accompanied by a handsome present from Anderson; he thanked her heartily for the pains she had taken with her late pupil; and he told her that she had sent him a daughter of whom any man might be proud.

Among the first who returned the calls were Mrs Beaumont and Mrs Stainer. They were shown upstairs to Zelma's sitting-room.

"Is this your drawing-room?" asked Mrs Beaumont.

"It is my private sitting-room. Here, you see, I have my painting; here my carving. Over there is my writing-table, with all my Italian and German books. This can hardly be called a drawing-room, for it is more like a studio; yet we have no other."

"If your father means to give dinner parties, you must have a drawing-room; and it should be downstairs. You cannot receive young men, who will call, up here."

This was but the beginning of much kind help and advice from Mrs Beaumont. Zelma received it all gratefully, and often went to her friend in any little household difficulty that occurred. She took it all with the sweetness of a compliant daughter, and won Mrs Beaumont's heart completely.

Minnie and Zelma spent many happy days in furnishing and ornamenting a room downstairs adjoining the large dining-room. There she was able to receive her friends and acquaintances, and the privacy of the upper story was unbroken.

By-and-by invitations were sent out for a garden party; Zelma found great pleasure in making the necessary arrangements and playing the hostess.

When the office was shut, and father and daughter sat together after dinner in the upper verandah, plans were discussed and entertainments talked over, as if nothing but pleasure formed the business of life. He was astonished at the amount of interest he felt in all her arrangements. Every success that attended her efforts filled his heart with pride. People not only came to his house to eat and drink of the good things that his money provided, but they gathered around the sterling good-hearted father and his beautiful fascinating daughter because they honestly liked them both.

The perfect harmony that reigned between the two had a charm of its own; none could look upon the middle-aged man, who had so long lived a lonely, unloved life, without feeling a sympathetic gladness in the warm sunshine of affection which his daughter shed around him.

People forgot all about her native mother,

and thought only of the girl's charming presence. Like her father, they fell at once under the influence of her beauty, her graciousness, and her dignity.

In the early morning before sunrise, the two might be seen galloping together over the open country beyond the cantonment. They would leave home before the stars had disappeared ; scarcely was the sun above the horizon when they were indulging in a pretence at racing, jumping over paddy-field boundary and fence in their headlong career, bringing peals of laughter from Zelma. Her spirits rose in the exuberance of youth as they dashed through the fresh morning air; her buoyancy and joyousness were infectious, and Anderson felt young again as he rode by her side. She loved those early rides, and used to say that they braced up her nerves and spirits for the work of the day.

Later on, the black horses were probably drawing the handsome brougham swiftly to some friend's house; or the sound of the piano filled the room above and gladdened the father's ears below. After lunch the hammer and chisel were busy on wood or brass. Never for a moment did the spirit flag, or the brain remain idle. As the sun declined to the west, Zelma was driving her pair of steeds to the club tennis courts, where she was always received with a hearty welcome.

All who saw the girl wondered at her sparkling vivacity, and the skill with which she filled the strange position fate had assigned her. She lost none of her beauty under the tropical sun; on the contrary, it seemed to develop in the warm climate which so tried her neighbours.

It was not likely that such a girl would be long without admirers. There were many young men in the station whose hearts beat quicker at her approach. They tried to show their devotion, but they met with little encouragement. Her indifference was so marked that she left them all without a ray of hope. Minnie looked on in amazement at the snubbings which Zelma so ruthlessly administered.

"How can you nip all their young affections in the bud, as you do? It seems so cruel. I should never have the courage to do it," she said one evening, as the two girls drove together after tennis. "That poor young Gibson would have given his ears to be allowed to occupy that seat," and Minnie pointed to the vacant *vis-à-vis* seat in the pretty victoria.

"He may keep his ears for his own use. In any case, he will certainly not be allowed a seat in my carriage," replied Zelma.

"Other girls drive and ride with young men occasionally, and why not you? Uncle George actually allowed Captain Bevan to

drive me to the Fort the other evening, when we made a party to go up the Rock," said Minnie, blushing as she mentioned Captain Bevan, in spite of her endeavours to look indifferent.

"You have your aunt to chaperon you; I have no one, and must chaperon myself."

"You seem quite able to take care of yourself. The young men make no impression whatever upon you; and yet they gather round you at every opportunity, for you seem to amuse them by what you say."

"That is just the case. I amuse them, but they do not amuse me. They appear to be a very uninteresting set."

"My aunt says that, taking them all round, they are as nice a set of men as you will meet in any station in India. I am of opinion, dear, that you unconsciously measure them all by too high a standard, and therefore they fall far short of it. That standard is Mr Percy Bell."

Minnie looked sharply into her companion's face as she said these words, but she detected no sign of consciousness as the other replied simply,—

"Yes, I think that must be it. I am gradually beginning to find out that Mr Bell was above the average young man. I hardly appreciated him on board the *Bombay*, though I saw a good deal of him. I never met any one—man, woman, or child—who

understood so well what I was thinking of. It was scarcely necessary to put all one's thoughts into words; he divined what one was going to say," and Zelma fell to musing.

"I was afraid of him; but, all the same, I should like to see him again. He will be here in March."

"We shall both be gone by then. You and your aunt are to be my guests at Ootacamund. We have secured a charming house for the six hot months."

"Is Mr Anderson going?"

"No; your aunt will have to take care of us. What are you gazing at over there?" asked Zelma suddenly, seeing that her companion's attention was wandering from the subject. "It is a cloud of dust; yes, and out of the dust comes Captain Bevan; oh, Minnie!" and she laughed merrily at the conscious girl.

Zelma pulled up her horses into a walk as they met him, and he wheeled round his Arab pony so as to ride by their side.

"Isn't it hot this evening?" he said, by way of opening the conversation.

Most conversations began in that way in Trichinopoly; for, even in the so-called cold weather, the heat was oppressive. Minnie murmured an assent to his remark, but Zelma exclaimed,—

"Hot! do you think so? After ten years of English fog and rain, I think this per-

fectly charming. I cannot understand the constant grumble I hear on all sides about the heat."

"You look as if you enjoyed it, Miss Anderson; but wait till you have been through a hot season here, and then we shall see if you sing the same song of joy over the weather."

A short time ago she would have rejoined with the remark that India was partly her country; and that it was likely that she would feel the heat less than the English. But lately she had grown very reticent on this subject. She relapsed into a thoughtful silence, and left Minnie to find the necessary small talk, which would amuse the young man.

He was in Colonel Beaumont's regiment, and he was suited in every way to become the successful lover of such a bright, simple-hearted maiden. Colonel and Mrs Beaumont were not blind to what was going on, but they were perfectly satisfied to let things take their course. Minnie had already endeared herself to them; and, if she should find a husband in the regiment, they would be well content.

Captain Bevan chatted on till Zelma, awakening out of her contemplative mood, touched her horses with the whip, and put them into a trot.

"We shall see you at the club, Captain

Bevan, so we need not say good-night," she said, as she left him behind in a cloud of dust.

The European community of Trichinopoly gathered at the club every evening, when no tennis party was going on elsewhere. The gentlemen found plenty of amusement within its walls; and for the ladies, there was a comfortable detached bungalow close to the club building. There they congregated under the punkah to gossip, or amuse themselves with games till their husbands and fathers were ready to return home to the eight o'clock dinner.

For many years Anderson had been a member of the club; but, until the return of his daughter, he had very rarely made his appearance within its walls. Now, however, she insisted on his going; insisted that the bay cob should be saddled and ready the moment he could tear himself from the office. She told him that she would be there without fail to drive him home; thus adding another inducement to tempt him out. At first it required an effort to mix again with his fellow-men; but gradually the shyness wore off, and Anderson grew to like the new life. Still better did he like the drive home, short as its was, with his daughter; and the *tête-à-tête* dinner in the well-lighted dining-room, to which they sat down soon after the clock struck eight.

It was a very happy life, complete within itself; and, to Zelma's young hopeful eyes, it opened out an endless vista of peace and contentment.

There was but one thing that clouded the brightness of her sky; that was her domestic relationship with her mother. With her natural tendency to idealise everything around her, she had invested her mother with even greater qualities of mind than had been for a time exhibited in the Brahmin lady's youth. Long since these had failed, leaving Mrs Anderson but a shadow of the clever woman whom Donald had made his wife.

After Zelma's first visit to her—which had opened her eyes to the fact that there was no place for any lengthened and daily companionship with Mrs Anderson—she accepted the situation, and contented herself with seeking her mother at odd hours in her room. During these frequent visits, she tried to awaken her mother's interest in her own doings. She told her of the beautiful rooms which her father had prepared for her; of the perfect piano; of the number of new books and magazines which each mail brought from England. She described the English homes with the pretty drawing-rooms; and one day she tried to push up the furniture of her mother's room to look more like civilisation.

But all her efforts were in vain. She might clean and dust the room, arrange her mother's pillows and mats artistically, and group the furniture around her. Half-an-hour after she left the room, everything was put back into its original position, and Mrs Anderson relapsed into her usual habits. When the daughter found that her mother made no attempt to rouse herself out of her indolence, she gave up trying to institute reforms.

One day she heard a bleating in the inner room, which she had never ventured to enter, and a black goat walked into the sitting-room, followed by two newly-born kids. Her mother smiled, and said that she was keeping the goat in her bedroom for a few days until the kids grew stronger.

Mrs Anderson never had much to say to her daughter, consequently it fell to Zelma to keep up the conversation. It was a difficult matter, and became a greater strain upon the mind each day that passed. She tried reading aloud, but the light was so bad that it hurt her sight; and though her mother listened placidly, she quickly perceived that the matter she was reading had no interest for her. Mrs Anderson was content to let her eyes dwell with indolent fondness upon her daughter, whilst she lent her ear to what she was saying, just as a handsome cat might hear the purring of its kitten.

When Zelma first noticed her mother's gaze, she was deceived into thinking that she was listening intelligently to what she was saying or reading. But by-and-by the veil fell from her eyes, and she recognised the embarrassing fact that her mother's sole interest was centred in herself; that it was immaterial whether she spoke or remained silent, so long as she sat in full view of her. It was such a different expression of love from the father's. He delighted in hearing her voice, and, though his eye frequently followed the movements of her graceful form with pleasure, he never devoured her with a gaze of affection. It was sufficient for him to know that she was near; he felt her presence without the constant aid of vision.

Zelma grew at last to present a different exterior towards her mother from that with which her father was familiar; and, finding that she must appeal to the former through the vision to awaken an interest, she adopted a habit of frequently taking something with her to her mother's room to show her. It was pandering to a simple, childlike taste, but, with her readiness to think the best of everything and everybody, she invested her mother with the guileless simplicity of a true child of nature, and she blamed herself for having appealed to the ear rather than the eye. She was anxious that her love for her

mother should not lessen, and she made greater efforts than before to establish herself upon an affectionate footing with the woman who seemed to love her so much.

She conquered her indifference to dress, and arrayed herself in her smartest and prettiest frocks, that her mother might be pleased. At first it succeeded; Mrs Anderson was delighted, and coaxed the rich materials, as a child loves to coax the soft, glossy fur of a cat. When the frocks were exhausted, Zelma displayed her jewels. These delighted her mother's eyes, which glistened as they fell on the sparkling gems. The fat soft fingers closed over diamond, ruby, and emerald with a greedy grasp. When she had examined each gem, she clasped necklace and bracelet one after another on her daughter's neck and arms, till she was loaded with them all. The girl was glad to find that her mother was pleased, and she allowed her to do as she liked, with sweet grace and gentle compliance.

When the last jewel was placed, Mrs Anderson clapped her hands with an exclamation of pleasure, and Zelma smiled as a mother might smile at a dear wayward child.

At the sound of the clapping the old aunt came in. Following close upon her heels appeared a young man in native dress. He wore no shoes on his feet, his garments were

of the finest Indian muslin, and a gracefully folded turban gave height and dignity to his appearance. A large, black, drooping moustache hid the well-cut lips of a firm but sensual mouth. He advanced towards Zelma, and stood looking at her with unabashed admiration. She drew herself up proudly, with the same look of resentment in her face which she had shown towards her mother's aunt on her arrival.

For a moment Mrs Anderson was only conscious of the old woman's presence. She began to speak volubly in open praise of her daughter's beauty, enhanced, as she considered it, by the wealth of jewels that sparkled even in the dim light of the room. Looking round she saw the man, but she expressed no surprise at his presence. She only changed from Tamil to English, and continued as fluently as before, addressing her conversation to him.

"Look, Rutnam, at my beautiful daughter. Is she not a pearl, a queen amongst maidens? so fair! so white! And see! the jewels that her father has given her! Could any one be more worthy of the priceless gems?"

Zelma was quite willing, from the love she bore her mother, to allow herself to be decked out like a doll, if it gave her parent any pleasure, but she had no intention of becoming a spectacle for strangers.

"Mother!" she exclaimed, "who is this

man? and what right has he to be here?"

Rutnam bowed apologetically with some dignity, whilst he looked towards Mrs Anderson for the necessary introduction.

"That is my cousin, Rutnam Iyengar, and this is his mother," said Mrs Anderson, pointing to the aunt. "He is your cousin too; he will be able to listen to all you say about your books and your studies, which he will understand far better than I."

Zelma gazed at her relative, and her manner softened. Rutnam was not slow to detect it; advancing a few steps he held out his hand. Zelma laid her pink palm in his, and was greeted with the familiar English handshake.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Anderson. I have heard so much of you from my mother and cousin that my curiosity has been awakened. I should have called on you in due form, but on second thoughts I decided that it would be best not to do so."

He spoke English with perfect intonation, and his manner was polished and deferential.

"Why should you not call upon me if you are my mother's relative?" asked Zelma.

"Because it is not to your advantage to have any of your mother's people identifying themselves with you. The Europeans of this place have received you, my cousin's

daughter, well. You cannot belong to both peoples; and, having chosen your father's —as indeed it was only right that you should, —you will find it impossible to maintain much intimacy with your mother's relations."

There was something of pride in his tone, and her warm, impulsive nature was roused into quick speech.

"I do not agree with you at all. I have every intention of knowing all my mother's relatives, if they have any desire to know me. I am glad to have met you, and I hope to have many opportunities of seeing more of you."

Rutnam bowed, and said,—

"We can meet here as often as you like. But it must rest with you, Miss Anderson, to decide how often."

She was pleased to find that he did not rush into cousinly familiarities, which would only have offended her delicate ear, and caused her to withdraw herself behind a shield of reserve and coldness. The respectful tone and the "Miss Anderson" impressed her favourably, although his eye still rested upon her graceful figure with an unflinching gaze of admiration.

They were a handsome young couple as they stood there facing each other, and, in spite of their different nationalities, wonderfully alike. There was more refinement in Zelma's face; but the signs of mental power

were the same in both. Rutnam's eyes were of a dark, piercing brown, set in clear pools of the purest white, unclouded by gross feeding, or by indulgence in those intoxicating foods which dull the senses without producing inebriation, and raise a world of fascinating dreams in the brain of the partaker. Rutnam lived frugally on the vegetarian diet common to all Brahmins; and he only took sparingly of the rich oils which supply the want of flesh in the vegetarian's diet.

As Zelma talked, she unfastened the jewels and handed them one by one to her mother, who took a delight in replacing them in their satin-lined cases. As the girl's fingers slowly manipulated the strong firm clasps, she continued talking. Rutnam, whilst he listened, quietly wheeled forward a chair, into which Zelma sank, smiling her thanks at him.

"Where do you live?" she asked, looking up at the young man kindly as he stood near her.

"At Srirungam, where I have a house by the river."

"Have you any profession?"

"My father, like yours, had money, and I have no need to work for my living. But I am by no means an idle man. I have chosen a line for myself which gives me ample occupation. I am one of the trustees

of the temple's lands and funds. Its money affairs are in my hands, in conjunction with my co-trustees. They have not so much spare time as I have, and they therefore give me the lion's share of the work. We have to give a yearly account of our stewardship to Government."

"And you come occasionally to see my mother? I wonder that we have not met before; but you are still standing. Sit down for a few minutes. Mother is in no hurry to get rid of me yet," and she smiled at Mrs Anderson, who looked pleased at the friendliness of the two young people.

The invitation to Rutnam was prettily and gracefully given; by it he might understand that she recognised his relationship, and was willing to accord him certain rights if he did not prove too pushing and obtrusive. He quite understood his position, and was not in the least likely to offend by any undue familiarities. He drew a chair forward, and dropped easily into it. He had learnt to do without his cushions, and was able to sit in a chair in European fashion, an accomplishment which was not shared by all his countrymen.

They talked on, and Rutnam told her of his school and education. He expressed regret that he had never been to England. It is a question whether this regret was real or no; but it was mentioned because Rut-

nam thought that Zelma would be pleased to know that he desired to see the country where she had spent so much of her youth. He spoke very modestly of himself and his attainments; but Zelma was not slow in perceiving that the man before her was well read and highly educated. He had a retentive memory, and could quote accurately from numbers of English and Indian authors, especially when he needed support in any argument or discussion.

When he had given a short and succinct account of himself, he asked Zelma a few questions about her own life whilst she had been away from her mother. There was no curiosity in his tone, and again Zelma was conscious of an amount of gratification, as she saw that he was more desirous of learning what her surroundings and studies had been, than of finding out any of the petty details of her private life.

She gave him a bright outline of her studies, mentioning how trying the English climate had been; but she said not a word of the feeling of repression which had so oppressed her, and which Percy Bell's sympathy drew from her at once. Rutnam possessed a subtle tact and a keen penetration, as quick and far-seeing as that of the civilian; but, unlike Percy, he was wholly devoid of the power of sym-

pathising. He could neither feel for nor with human emotion. He could detect its presence, and, perhaps, arouse it; but he was wholly unable to identify himself with the pains and pleasures of others; he was too self-centred. He failed to penetrate the sensitive reserve which covered Zelma's personality.

Feeling instinctively that she could not speak of herself, she was the more grateful to him for the consideration she fancied he showed in not displaying any inquisitiveness as to her school life and friends. Of her studies she could talk freely and with pleasure.

When she had finished, he asked if she had read certain books which bore upon her studies; his questions showed that he possessed a wide and accurate knowledge of all the subjects she had enumerated. A few words of sharp, well-directed criticism here and there also told her that he had read the books he mentioned, and had digested them thoroughly.

She expressed her surprise that, having never been to England, he should be so well informed and well-read.

"I do not forget the fact that English is a foreign language to you," she said. "It is the more wonderful to me, therefore, that you should have all this information at your fingers' ends."

"We Orientals are very quick at picking

'up a language, as perhaps you know. We learn English side by side with Tamil, and often master the English grammar before we have learnt to write our own mother tongue. Tamil is a very difficult language; it is sometimes easier to express one's self in English by a single word than in the long descriptive sentence which would be required in Tamil. At school we received a great deal of instruction in English; even the native masters lectured in it occasionally."

"It is very strange to hear it flow so easily from your lips, as you have nothing in your appearance which associates you with anything European. Yet you not only speak, but, if I mistake not, you think in the language," said Zelma.

Rutnam was pleased with the compliment, and he had sense enough to see that she was making no attempt to flatter him. He replied without vanity,—

"When I am with Europeans, I certainly think in the tongue I am using, which shows how thoroughly I have learnt it, thanks to my good and worthy master at the college."

The jewels were by this time all put back in their cases, with the exception of the necklace of emeralds, the centre stone of which was the strange Alexandrite gem. As Zelma handed the necklace to her mother, she pointed to the stone, and asked if she knew what it was.

Mrs Anderson looked at it, and, with an exclamation of surprise, showed it to Rutnam. He leaned towards her, extending his hand, and took it from her with a firm grasp, as though he meant to retain it.

No native of India can handle money or jewels with indifference. There is an indescribable greediness expressed by the outstretched fingers, and the quick closing of them over the coveted articles in the palm. In spite of Rutnam's wealth and education, the natural instinct of the Hindu to snatch at treasure and hide it peeped out.

He got up and walked to the window, which was closely shielded by the thick blind. He pushed the blind a little aside, and let the sun fall directly upon the stone, gazing for some seconds at it in silence. Then returning, he replaced the necklace in its case. Mrs Anderson played with it for a few minutes before she finally closed the box.

"Where did your father get that stone?" asked Rutnam.

"I don't know. Have you seen how those particular gems change in lamplight?" said Zelma.

"I know its properties well. The natives believe that the Alexandrite dropped originally from the eyes of one of their gods. They are very rare, and highly prized in the temples; when the lamps are lighted before

the swami, the Alexandrite seems to dart lurid fire at the worshippers; they believe that the god has awakened, and is listening to their petitions."

"What terrible superstition! You surely do not believe in such things, nor in the gods of your antique religion?"

There was something in her tone which expressed faith in his superior judgment. Rutnam looked at her in silence for a moment. He read her mind accurately, and was ready to say just exactly what he knew would best please her. His pliable subtle nature was accustomed to bend and fit itself to the moods of others with infinite tact; this deceived Zelma into believing that their thoughts were in perfect harmony.

When she asked him that question about his personal belief, she touched him on a very sensitive point. In spite of his English education, and the advanced views he had imbibed, he still retained a strong predeliction for the faith of his forefathers. He had long ago given up all belief in the supernatural power of the images, which filled the temples of his country; but he accepted the moral philosophy of his sacred books, and rigorously adhered to all the domestic rites of his caste. He moreover fully realised and valued the enormous power of the Brahmin caste over the masses.

Only comparatively few Brahmins became permanent ministrants in the temples; but in those few were contained a strength and influence which could not be gauged. No matter what god was worshipped, or how small the temple, the person who managed its affairs and controlled its revenues was a Brahmin. Even the temples dedicated to the devils—the rakshasas—in the South were indirectly under the management of the sacred twice-born caste. In fact, the Brahmins held the lower castes of all grades, from the exclusive goldsmiths and silk-weavers to the lowest pariahs, the sweepers and shoemakers, in an iron grip of social and religious control.

Rutnam was fully aware of the importance of this power. The wealth of the temple of Srirungam was very great; a large part of its revenues flowed in through the voluntary offerings of the multitude of worshippers, who came yearly from all parts of India to sacrifice at Vishnu's shrine, and bathe in the sacred waters of the Cauvery. That wealth was in the trustees' hands, and practically at their disposal. Rutnam therefore felt the strongest personal interest in retaining his faith.

Zelma's mother was a munificent donor and a bigoted adherent to Hinduism. Rutnam would gladly have made an unqualified admission of belief in the gods of his

country, for the sake of the woman who was listening; but his quick wit told him that such an admission would lower him forever in her eyes. He had every reason for standing well with her; he was not at all certain of the amount of influence the daughter might obtain over the mother. His answer was evasive.

"I should much like to discuss this subject with you some day. Yours is not a question that can be answered in a few words, or you would be left with a wrong impression. I think that I may safely say that you and I worship the same God, but of course under different forms. It must be a matter of very little importance to the Supreme Deity, how the necessary adoration and submission of his creatures reaches Him, provided it comes from the heart in all good faith. Your own priests teach that He is no respecter of persons; that the prayer of faith may be offered in the sacred building or in the secret chamber. As each man clothes and feeds himself according to the tradition of his nation, so he worships his god in that particular manner which his forefathers have used before him. He is not responsible for that form any more than he is responsible for the fashion of his dress. He must be a narrow-minded man indeed, and one possessed of blasphemous presumption, who dares to measure the Almighty's

mind by his own small mental vision, and to say that God will only accept one particular form of worship, and that a form invented by man."

Zelma's mind had never turned upon religious discussion. She was a good girl, and a pure-minded woman, whose religion was shown in her daily life, and in the sweet performance of her daily duties. No storms of disbelief or doubt had crossed her spirit to disturb the simple faith which good Miss Benson had carefully instilled. But though she had given very little thought to the matter hitherto, she could see the danger of such a plausible argument as Rutnam was advancing. She replied quickly,—

"But one form may be pure and the other impure, having deteriorated from want of care. I know that water may find its way to the great river by very diverse channels; but it is possible that one channel may convey pure liquid, whilst the other may carry foul and muddy water."

Rutnam was not slow in catching at her figure of speech, and dexterously turning it into a metaphor that suited his own views.

"Whatever it is, the great river does not refuse it. It absorbs good and bad; and purifies all alike in its sandy bed without reproach; giving an equal welcome to both. It makes no invidious distinctions; but receives, silently and for good, whatever is

offered, as being the best the mountain has to give."

She could not help feeling that her ready-tongued cousin turned and twisted things with a quickness which she found difficult to follow. She did not answer immediately, and Mrs Anderson, taking advantage of the silence, said,—

"You must come again, Ahmonee, and talk with Rutnam about these things. But, my child, do you think that your father will let you come, and make the acquaintance of my people? He does not know that Rutnam visits me."

Mrs Anderson looked disturbed and anxious. It was not because she had hidden these matters from her husband, but on account of his possible disapproval of any intimacy springing up between Zelma and her Hindu relatives. She knew that her husband was quite capable of stopping her daughter's visits except at stated times. It was an immense pleasure to her to see Zelma daily, and without any restriction. The sudden thought that this might cease brought a spasm to her heart, and made her fearful and nervous. Zelma, however, reassured her.

"Do not fear, dear mother; I shall tell my father, of course, that I have met Rutnam, and I am sure that he will not be vexed. I shall ask him to let you drive me

over to Srirungam, to see our cousin in his own house."

Zelma smiled pleasantly at both. Her words were kindly spoken, yet there was a certain haughtiness and condescension in her tone that jarred on the young man's feelings, and made him writhe inwardly, under a sense of patronage from one whom he longed to regard as an equal. Nothing could be further from her thoughts than any intention of assuming superiority over him. On the contrary, she had tried to be friendly throughout the interview — an interview which she had not sought, but which had been unexpectedly thrust upon her. Fortunately for her peace of mind, she did not perceive that her words had jarred upon Rutnam's sensitive, self-conscious nerves; otherwise, in the impulse of the moment, she might have dropped her reserve and unwittingly have opened the door to those very familiarities she wished to avoid.

Rutnam, hiding his annoyance, replied, with ease and deference,—

"My mother and I shall have much pleasure in receiving you, Miss Anderson, whenever you like to come. It will be an honour to show you my house, which is one of the finest in the Island. I should so much like to take you over our temple at the same time, if you will allow me."

They had both risen from their chairs,

and were standing together. The young Brahmin hesitated a moment, and then said,—

"Miss Anderson, I am going to ask a great favour of you. I hope you will grant it."

"Certainly I will, if I can," replied Zelma heartily.

"I want you to promise that you will not go to our temples as a mere sight-seer, especially when the festivals are taking place. The Europeans here—and in other parts of India, too—have a habit of going to our Indian temples to satisfy their idle curiosity. They gaze at the buildings, the ornamentation, the votaries of the temple, and the performance of the religious rites, as though they were all a spectacle and a show. They pry inquisitively into everything, and would desecrate the inner shrine itself if we did not keep them out with a firm hand. What would they think if we crowded their churches during the hours of service, and peered about in idle curiosity? I should like you to see our temple; and I should feel highly honoured if you would let me show you what there is to be seen, myself."

Rutnam spoke earnestly, and Zelma's sympathies were fully roused. She promised readily to do as he wished. She held out her hand to him, and said, smiling prettily,—

"Good-bye, Rutnam, for the present. I

am very glad we have met, but it is not easy to believe that you are a cousin."

He watched her down the passage where there was more light; she turned and nodded to him as she passed through the curtain, her ayah following close upon her steps, bearing the precious burden of jewels.

CHAPTER XII.

EVIL THOUGHTS.

"The dutifulness of children is the foundation of all virtues."—CICERO.

RUTNAM went back to Mrs Anderson's room and threw himself on the cushions at her feet, resting his elbow on one of her numerous pillows. He also took off his turban—a thing that natives only do when quite at their ease in the retirement of their families — and passed his slender fingers through the short glossy black hair that covered his head. On certain occasions, when his religion demanded it, he shaved his head; but between the intervals of shaving he allowed his hair to grow, and took a secret pride in wearing it like a European.

"Your daughter is very beautiful," he said, in Tamil.

Mrs Anderson looked pleased, and murmured words of assent.

"You heard what I said to her about visiting the temple?" he asked.

"Yes; what was your reason for it? There surely could be no harm in joining her young friends when they go to see one of the chief sights of South India?" said Mrs Anderson.

"There might be great harm," answered Rutnam emphatically. "In the first place, she might see *you* there standing amongst the worshippers. You would never be able to convince her that you also had merely gone for the purpose of sight-seeing; she would be filled with disgust if she knew that you went as one of us, even though she may be aware of the fact that you are of our religion. If you lost her respect, and lowered yourself in her eyes, I am certain that you would also lose your daughter."

"Swami forbid!" murmured the Brahmin lady. "I should die if I lost my daughter again."

So Mrs Anderson thought, but the daughter had long ago been superseded by religion.

"Another reason for saying what I did lies in the fact that, plainly speaking, I do not wish her to see the temple unless I am there to explain the various signs, and give her such an account of the various rites and ceremonies of our religion as will awaken her interest and enlist her sympathies. Above all, I wish to guard against her being shocked by the behaviour of the lower castes. We cannot control their vagaries, or ensure that

they shall not be under the influence of bhang and arrack. As you know, we Brahmins are indifferent to the herd of sight-seers, Europeans and Americans, who crowd our temples every cold season. Some of them drop a few coins into our coffers, but the greater number do no harm and no good."

"They see very little of the temple after all," said Mrs Anderson.

"We never allow them to set foot within the shrine of the god Sri Runga, which is our true temple. The little they see tells them no more than the outside cover of a book. We keep them and the pariahs on the same level," and the young man laughed contemptuously and disagreeably.

"Is it only for my sake that you are so careful over Zelma's visit to the temple?" asked Mrs Anderson; "because, if so, I could arrange to go to Srirungam only on those occasions when I knew she was safely employed elsewhere with her pleasures and studies."

"No, it is not that alone. You surely noticed your daughter's jewels? And you do not forget the fact that your husband has settled the whole of his property on his daughter. You have only a life-interest in a small portion of it—ample, it is true, to maintain you as you now live—but you have no control over the principal. Now, I have

every hope that we shall eventually secure a considerable slice out of that wealth for our temple. In these days of model government by a foreign power,"—Rutnam again spoke with contempt,—"it is impossible to use force; we must therefore be discreet. Through you, I trust, I shall be able to work upon the girl's feelings, and get something out of her."

"I doubt very much if you will succeed. Zelma has her father's clear head to guide her; and though she may be exceedingly kind to me, she is not likely to extend her charities to my people."

He answered quietly,—

"If diplomacy fails, there are other means of securing the jewels. When once they are lodged within the walls of the inner temple, they are safe. No European can follow them there, for the law protects us from outrages upon our caste. No one but a Brahmin policeman could enter the inner sanctuary of the temple, and we should have nothing to fear from him; he would be religiously blind," he laughed unpleasantly.

The Brahmin lady looked anxiously into his handsome, subtle face. She was disturbed at the thought of her daughter being coerced to give, or, still worse, of being robbed if she refused to bestow her money and jewels upon the heathen gods of her mother's people. Yet her devotion to the

interests of the temple made her fully alive to the importance of securing, if possible, a part of the wealth that would one day be Zelma's. Nothing would rejoice her heart more than a voluntary gift, made without undue influence; but such a gift she knew to be almost impossible, certainly most improbable. The poor woman felt torn in two. Her love for her child and her strong animal instinct to protect her offspring fought against her religious duty to her gods.

"It will be a noble and meritorious deed to secure the Alexandrite stone for the great god Vishnu," said Rutnam, who watched her narrowly, and saw that the mother's loyalty to her daughter was wavering.

"My reward would be great?" she asked, anxious to be reassured, and to have some means of quieting her conscience.

"You would receive the highest reward after death which it is possible for a good Brahmin to receive," he said, with great solemnity.

His words seemed to the ignorant lady as though they fell from the lips of the god himself. She received them with implicit faith, and stifled her better instincts which prompted her to rebel against any plotting to deceive and cheat her daughter.

He perceived that her scruples were vanishing before the dazzling future he so unblushingly promised her; but he said

no more about the jewels, being content to let matters rest awhile.

"When does she usually visit you?" he asked.

"She comes between nine and ten in the morning, after her ride. She also looks in for a few minutes after lunch at about three. I am very sleepy then, so she does not stay long; if I could keep awake she would probably stay longer. And she always runs in before the eight o'clock dinner, after she is dressed, to show me her pretty frock, and to say good-night."

"I must meet her again in a few days, but it must be apparently accidental. By-and-by she shall drive over to Srirungam to see the temple."

There was a quiet decision about the young Brahmin that made it impossible for Mrs Anderson to say no. She had no desire to oppose him, however; she saw that no harm was intended so far, and the visit would give her daughter nothing but pleasure.

Rutnam's mother presently joined the pair, bringing her son a fragrant basin of coffee. Whilst he drank it, holding the beautiful china bowl poised on the tips of the fingers, the two women talked household gossip, and more especially of the inferiority of the last purchase of rice. Rutnam paid no heed to their desultory chatter; he let

his thoughts wander to Zelma, and her beauty and her wealth. By-and-by he got up, replaced his turban, and left the room without a word.

The two women watched his departure, breaking off in their conversation for a few moments. Although the woman's voice is so often raised to rule and arbitrate in domestic affairs in the Hindu family, though she brow-beats and rates her sons and nephews till they sit stolid and silent under her abuse, they do not show her any outward respect. They enter or leave her presence without the smallest sign of courtesy or deference. This extraordinary state of affairs is countenanced by the women themselves; bitter indeed would the upbraidings of the mother be towards the son who dared to show his wife any respect, or who ventured to perform the most ordinary act of courtesy.

If he included his own mother in his little acts of chivalry, he would meet with a scathing scorn, which would effectually nip his chivalry in the bud.

Mrs Anderson and Rutnam's mother were not in the least surprised when he left the room thus; the cessation of conversation between them was only part of the homage they offered to the lords of creation they so soundly rated and ruled in the bosom of their families.

Rutnam passed through the room at the back, and down by a stone staircase, which led into the wide verandah behind the house. Very modestly he walked the length of the compound to the outer gateway, where his one-horse gharry awaited him. Any one seeing him from the house would have taken him for one of the clerks; and neither Anderson nor his daughter would have noticed his coming or going, or have suspected that he was a relative of the lady of the house.

When Zelma sat down with her father that evening to dine, she told him that she had met a young Brahmin, who had claimed relationship with her.

Anderson looked surprised and annoyed.

"Where?" he asked brusquely.

"In my mother's room."

His face expressed what he felt. He was filled with a mad wish to flee away from his surroundings, and carry off his beautiful daughter to some far-away country, where she might forget her mother and all that belonged to her. There were times when, in spite of his loyalty to the woman he had made his wife, he shuddered at the idea of having brought his daughter into daily contact with her. A moment's consideration sufficed to assure him that he was mad to dream of forsaking his wife. His daughter would never consent to such a

thing. He comforted himself with the thought that Zelma was not likely to take any harm under the circumstances. The most she would suffer at her mother's hands would be annoyance. The girl's sweet voice helped to soothe his disturbed mind.

"You surely are not angry, father? It is absolutely necessary that we should face the situation. However much we may endeavour to ignore and forget these relations of my mother, they still exist. This man Rutnam was polite and civil both in manner and speech. It is far better that I should see him naturally and easily than assume a superiority which, in my inmost heart, would strike me as being vulgar and low-bred. My mother, too, is pleased when I treat her people with consideration."

"But, Zelma, you don't know what you are undertaking. You can never establish yourself on a friendly footing with them. Better let them alone."

Donald would like to have added, "As I have done," but something kept him quiet.

"I don't agree with you, dear father. They can do me no harm, whether I know them and am polite to them, or whether I scorn and neglect them. It goes against the grain with me to be rude, more especially as it would be disloyal and rude to my mother at the same time."

Anderson could not help feeling that a

reproach underlaid her words. He had never troubled himself to become friendly with his wife's people. Now, his daughter was voluntarily taking up his neglected duties in her sweet unbidden way.

"God bless you, my noble child!" he ejaculated under his breath. Then he said aloud, "By all means, see as much as you like of your mother's people; but, for Heaven's sake, do not attempt to idealise them. They have their virtues, but the Hindu race is centuries behind the English nation in cultivation and refinement of thought. We cannot place even the educated Brahmin upon an equality with us without descending somewhat to his level. Your mother in her early days was a slight exception, because she was separated from her home influences for four years previous to her marriage. During that time, her whole mind was given to her studies. But, even with these advantages, you must recognise the fact that she in no way resembles the English lady of her age and position at home. She falls far short of the English woman's standard. Her relatives will be found even more wanting when you weigh them in the balance which your education has established in your mind. I can trust you not to rush into friendships and form undesirable companionships."

There was no query in the tone in which

Anderson uttered the last sentence, for he was learning to place infinite faith in his daughter.

"I want no companionship from them; but I am anxious to meet my mother's relations without prejudice. It would be impossible for me to establish any intimacy with them, although I have a great wish to talk to them, and form my own opinions as to their merits and demerits."

"You have the determination of your Scotch ancestors in you," said Anderson, with a smile, "combined, I hope, with their clear-headedness, which will probably carry you safely over the quicksands of your life. Now, let us talk of something else. I heard Minnie Beaumont telling you this evening that you ought to give a dance at Christmas. Shall we turn the old house upside down during the holidays and have a ball?"

"Oh, yes, father; it will be delightful."

They plunged at once into the details, and Anderson gave his daughter leave to do as she liked in the matter of arrangements.

It was ten o'clock at night on New Year's Eve when Zelma stood in the large central hall of her father's house, receiving her guests. She wore a handsome dress of white satin, on which sparkled some of her rarest diamonds and emeralds. The Alex-

andrite shot forth its lurid rays in the light of the lamps as it lay upon her fair neck, rising and falling with her breath, which was quickened under the excitement of welcoming the guests.

All the Europeans in the station were expected; they who had visitors staying with them for Christmas were invited to bring them, an invitation which was eagerly accepted.

Minnie had arrived early, and was already happy in the thought that Captain Bevan's name was down for four dances in her programme. She and Zelma had spent a busy day together, putting the finishing touches to the rooms and verandahs. Even the office and its adjoining writing-room, where the clerks sat, had been thrown open, under a new dress of beautiful Indian draperies. The tightly-packed shelves of papers, the inky tables, the whitewashed walls, were all hidden by cunning arrangements of foliage and hangings. Comfortable couches and lounges were grouped here and there, or placed in pairs in retired nooks. Lamps of all kinds lighted up the numerous rooms and the wide verandahs, whilst outside gay Chinese lanterns swung in the night breeze from portico and tree.

Zelma was satisfied that all was done, and that there remained nothing but enjoyment before her for the rest of the evening. She had

secured enough ladies to dance with all the gentlemen, a matter of some difficulty in up country stations; a well-appointed supper was prepared, and magnums of champagne were already cooling in ice-tubs. A large staff of servants, headed by old Anthony, waited in the background, ready to perform their duties when called upon. Happy in the completeness of the evening, Zelma was looking radiant. Her old friends could not help observing her brilliancy, whilst the visitors were struck with amazement at her beauty, her perfect dress, her magnificent jewels, and the harmonious surroundings of the queen-like girl.

There was a pause in the stream of arrivals, and Zelma had a few moments of relief from hand-shaking. She turned to her father, who stood near her, and asked him to sign to the band to begin; it was the band belonging to one of the regiments stationed at Trichinopoly. At that moment Minnie came up, closely followed by the tall, good-looking captain.

"I have such a piece of news for you," she whispered; "you have been so engaged hitherto that I have not been able to get near you to tell you."

Zelma glanced from Minnie to the young man, expecting to be told of their happy engagement. Minnie gave her no time to say anything, but ran on,—

"Who do you think is coming to night?" Zelma was puzzled.

"Surely only those I have invited. I have a list somewhere."

"There is one whose name, I am sure, is not down. Mrs Stainer is bringing Mr Bell."

"Mr Bell!" repeated Zelma in surprise. He was the last man she expected to see, for he seemed to have passed out of her life completely.

"He arrived in Trichinopoly quite late this very evening. After I left you to go home to dress, I saw him; he was walking from the station, so I presume the Stainers knew nothing of his coming, or they would have met him," said Minnie.

"Did you stop and speak to him?" asked Zelma.

"Of course I did; I asked him what piece of good luck brought him here. He said—"

But what he said she was not destined to hear, for at that moment the band struck up. Captain Bevan had been waiting impatiently in the background; he now came forward and claimed his partner.

Zelma turned to receive more guests with her mind somewhat confused. Had Mr Bell told Minnie that he was coming that evening? It was hardly likely. Indeed, it was far more probable that he would be the means of keeping Mrs Stainer away.

Minnie's lively imagination was apt to jump to conclusions.

But though she told herself that it was unlikely that he would come, she caught herself more than once scanning each new arrival with something like eagerness. She was not dancing the first few dances purposely, so that she might be at liberty to welcome her friends as they arrived, even though they were late.

"I think every one has arrived by this time," said Mr Anderson, a little later. "It is time you began to think of your own dances."

"Mrs Stainer is not here," replied Zelma.

"Probably she will not come. I know Mr Stainer is too busy with his services at the Fort church to-night to get here. I doubt if Mrs Stainer will appear without her good husband."

She was about to turn into the ballroom when a carriage drew up under the portico; from it stepped Percy Bell, who handed Mrs Stainer out after him. She went forward to meet them with a bright, happy smile of welcome. She was surprised at her own feeling of gladness at the sight of the familiar face and figure of the civilian.

"I have taken the liberty of bringing an old friend to-night without an invitation. I hope you will forgive me," said Mrs Stainer, shaking hands with father and daughter.

"I am delighted to meet you again," said

Zelma as she laid her gloved hand in Percy's. "It was very good of you to come, in this friendly way."

There was a ring of gladness in the girl's tone, unknown to herself, which fell like music on Percy's ear; his eyes lightened with pleasure as he looked down into hers.

"I am only passing through Trichinopoly on my way south, where I have business. I thought I should like to stop twenty-four hours, and look up my old friends."

Anderson had given his arm to Mrs Stainer, and led her off to have a cup of that delicious coffee for which his butler was famous. Percy and Zelma were therefore alone. He scanned her closely, and she laughed as his eyes swept over her, taking in every detail of her appearance.

"Well, are you satisfied?" she asked, challenging his criticism.

"You are not altered at all. The climate treats you kindly, and, if anything, you look better than when we parted."

"Yes, I am wonderfully well, and oh, so happy. It has all been so beautiful, so complete."

The joyous tone was unmistakable.

"Father is the dearest and best of men. I cannot think how I lived so long without him."

Percy smiled down upon the happy face beside him.

"I am very glad," he said heartily. "You need not tell me that life has fulfilled your dearest expectations. I can read it in your eyes. You will not complain now of being stifled and chained down by climate and discipline."

"No, I live in my own sunny home, and I feel as though I could sing a song of praise and gratitude all day long for the good things which God had in store for me."

She moved towards the ballroom, and laid her hand upon the arm which Percy offered. He said,—

"Are you engaged for this dance? No? then let us have a turn, though it is nearly over. I suppose your card is full for the rest of the evening?"

"I have not allowed any names to be put down, as I am hostess to-night; I prefer to see my guests dancing; I am binding myself by no promises."

"Still free?" said Percy, passing his arm round her waist and moving into the circling couples. He could not resist asking the question as the opportunity offered itself, though he knew quite well that she alluded only to promises for the dance.

Zelma laughed, and answered the question in the spirit in which it was asked.

"As free as air! I am too much in love with my dear old father to have a serious thought for any one else."

Her words sent a glow of satisfaction through him; but he shrank from asking himself why he should be gratified to hear that she was still fancy-free.

They danced for a little time, and then the music ceased. The exercise had flushed Zelma's cheeks, and her large, luminous eyes sparkled with enjoyment. Percy was about to lead her off among the palms in the verandah, when a young man came up to them, and asked her for a dance.

"Hullo, Gibson!" said Percy; "how are you?"

"Oh, is that you, Bell? What brings you to Trichinopoly?" replied the youth.

He spoke indifferently, but his anxious glance was fixed on Zelma. It was evident to Percy that he had no eyes or ears for any one else. If she was fancy-free, others were not where she was concerned.

"Will you give me the seventh dance, Miss Anderson?" he asked.

"I make no engagements beforehand to-night," replied Zelma, firmly but kindly. "I do not intend to dance much, and I am afraid I must refuse to promise so far ahead."

The boy blushed, and seemed terribly disappointed. He worshipped the ground she trod upon, and was trying to pluck up courage to propose to her that very evening. Zelma had some suspicion of this, consequently she was the more ready to put

him off, as she did not wish to mortify him by the refusal she had made up her mind to give him. Percy read the young man's secret easily, and saw also the hopelessness of his passion. He pitied him profoundly, but there came that same glow of satisfaction over his heart which he had felt a short time before, when Zelma told him she was free.

"Will you dance this next with me?" asked Gibson.

"Are you not engaged to some one else?" she asked.

Gibson stammered a reply to the effect that it did not matter; he could get out of it.

"Oh, but that will not do at all, Mr Gibson," she exclaimed. "I must go and talk to the judge's wife and those ladies near her."

And before either of them could say another word she had left the two men standing together, gazing blankly at her retreating figure.

Percy saw no more of her for some time, except at a distance. It was easy to distinguish her amongst the crowd, with her flashing diamonds, her rich dress, and bright, happy face. He did not know many people there, so he had plenty of time to watch the girl. Yes, she was unchanged, except for the better, he decided. Her beauty had developed; her happiness had shed a halo of brightness around her, and driven away

that dreaminess and diffident reserve with which she had formerly been enveloped. She was in everything but birth the sweet English maiden, joyous and happy, simple and gracious, that she had been from the very first.

As he gazed critically at her dress and jewels, and looked round with observant eye at the noble house so handsomely furnished, a sense of the fitness of everything struck him; he was conscious of an intense satisfaction, and an absence of all disappointment. A voice broke in upon his reverie; a couple approached where he sat, half hidden behind a group of ferns.

"Yes," said the gentleman, "it is the most perfect ball I was ever at in this country. We do things on a larger scale in Madras, but we cannot do them better."

"She is a lucky girl," said the lady. "I should like to have the spending of Mr Anderson's rupees."

"But how would you like the native mother, who would have to be considered as well as the rupees? I don't think that any amount of wealth would compensate me for that touch of the country which runs in Miss Anderson's veins."

"We forget the mother altogether when we know the daughter. She really is the most charming girl I ever met. Of course, in the depths of our hearts, we are all a little

jealous of her fortune. Who would not be? But there is no girl more popular than she is. She has conquered prejudice, and made a place for herself in society by her own sweet, winning manner."

"You are very warm in her praise," said the gentleman, with a smile. In his opinion, women seldom bestowed unqualified praise on one another.

"She has the rare charm of being able to fascinate both the sexes. It is easy to find a woman who can please either one or the other, but it is very uncommon to hear men and women enthusiastically agreeing that a beautiful girl is as near perfection as she can be. If you ask any of the people who know her, you will find that they are one and all unanimous in her praise. I suppose she gets her pretty manners from her father," said the girl.

"And her good looks from her mother," added her companion. "Does any one ever come across the mother?"

"Never; Zelma does not seem at all ashamed of her; but she rarely speaks of her, and has never been seen with her in public or in private. I fancy Mrs Anderson leads the regular retired semi-gosha life of a caste women."

"Oh, she is of good caste, then?" said the gentleman.

"Yes; I believe she is a Brahmin, and

that Mr Anderson married her because of her beauty."

"Possibly she is peeping at us now, hidden behind some curtain or screen. She doubtless wonders what pleasure we can all find in gyrating round an empty room in this fashion. Shall we take another turn if you are sufficiently rested?"

They moved away out of Percy's hearing.

So, then, the girl had successfully established her identity as an Englishwoman, and her friends could forget the existence of the native mother after they came to know the daughter intimately. Well, it was nothing more than he himself had felt on board the ship that brought them out, when they were thrown into daily companionship.

He was beginning to wonder if he would have another opportunity of talking to her that evening, when he heard Anderson's voice at his elbow.

"We are going to have supper now. Will you find a lady to take? I think we shall manage to sit down all together, though it will be rather a crush."

The band began to play "The Roast Beef of Old England," and Zelma, seeing her father and Percy Bell together, went to them.

"Father, you must take Mrs Beaumont in, and we will all follow you without any further regard to rank or precedence."

"May I take you in, Miss Anderson?" asked Percy eagerly.

"Presently; but first I must see that none of my friends are left out. Will you come round with me? and we will look up everybody."

Percy was quite ready to assist her, and together they went round, finding partners amongst the whist players and chaperons, and pairing off the unhappy wallflowers of either sex, who did not dance; but yet who had acquired an uncommonly good appetite for the midnight feast.

The large tent, where the supper was arranged, was soon full. A file of servants moved in with plates of hot soup. The clatter of glass and crockery, and the hum of happy voices, told the host and hostess that their friends were doing full justice to the good fare, and that they themselves might think only of their own supper.

Anderson kept his eye on his watch, and a few minutes before midnight he rose from his chair. Calling for champagne, he had the glasses filled. Then, in a few words, he wished his guests a happy new year, and proposed the good health of friends, absent and present.

As he ceased speaking, the cantonment gun boomed forth, and the three big bells in the Roman Catholic cathedral clanged out a frantic attempt at a peal. The familiar

sound of the church bells, following closely upon the thoughts of home, just raised by Anderson, moistened many a lady's eye, and gave some of the men a choky feeling. The file of swarthy servants stood motionless, as though they were present at some religious ceremony. The punkahs waved overhead, and the balmy air of a tropical night blew softly through the tent. There was a breathless silence throughout the assemblage, but it only lasted a few short seconds. The company rose in a body and drank the toast proposed. A Scotchman present began a bar of "Auld Lang Syne," the rest, catching it up, joined in, and raised a volume of sound in the old familiar strains.

Anderson was touched. It was many years since he had heard "Auld Lang Syne" sung round the convivial board. It was an unexpected pleasure, and an honour to his nationality.

Percy glanced at Zelma. There was a look of deep emotion on her face; her eyes were bright with the joy and pleasure of seeing her father's delight. She met Percy's gaze for a moment, and the fresh colour of youth mounted into her face, changing her softness to brilliancy.

"How splendid that girl looks to-night," whispered Colonel Beaumont to Mrs Stainer, whom he had taken in to supper.

Mrs Stainer nodded, and replied,—

"Yes; and, if I am not mistaken, that young man by her side is of our opinion."

Colonel Beaumont glanced at the handsome pair as they sat down to continue their supper.

"They are well matched. There is just that foreign strain in him which makes such a union possible. They ought to have much in common, those two. He certainly is the only man here who can be said to be her equal intellectually. None of the others understand her."

"Nevertheless they lose their hearts to her," replied Mrs Stainer.

"And to her fortune," added the worldly Colonel, with a laugh which robbed his speech of all malice.

The supper proceeded; the young people, eager to begin dancing again, were the first to go. They were followed at intervals by their elders. Zelma and Percy left the table together; he gave her his arm, and they went back to the ballroom.

"People seem very happy here; they are all dancing with a renewed vigour, worthy of the old country. Will you dance, Miss Anderson?" said Percy.

"I would rather not, thanks. I have refused so many times this evening; but if you do not want to dance this with anyone else, I shall be glad if you will sit it out with me.

I want to tell you all about my beautiful home."

Her friendly tones thrilled through the young man. He forgot her indifference at parting, and his jealousy of the father who had come between them; he thought only of those days on board the *Bombay*, when she had opened her pure young heart to him, and forged such sweet bonds of friendship. There was a new light in his eyes as he answered,—

"It is what I should like of all things."

She laid her hand upon his arm, and said,—

"First, then, I will show you the house."

She led him into the big hall, and beyond, into her father's office.

"Here is my father's den," and she described what it was like in its normal condition.

"You have seen the dining-room, which we have turned into a ballroom for the evening, because it has such a good floor. The whist-players are in the drawing-room."

"And where do you generally sit?" asked Percy, far more interested in what immediately concerned herself.

"My rooms are upstairs, and I will show them to you now, if you are not engaged for the next dance."

Percy, like young Gibson, would have played the fairest maid false for another half-hour with her. He was not engaged,

however, and they went slowly up the broad, black staircase, with its quaint carved balustrade, its spacious landing, ornamented with pots of palms and ferns, into the quietude of the gallery above. As they passed the purdah that hung before the passage, leading to Mrs Anderson's apartments, Zelma said,—

"That leads to my mother's rooms. She never comes out, you know."

It was the first time she had mentioned her mother. Percy hesitated a moment, and then asked,—

"Were you disappointed in her?"

She glanced at him. Was it curiosity that prompted his question? No; there was a ring of anxiety in his tone, and an apprehensive look upon his face, that told her he feared to learn that she had suffered disappointment. With perfect trust she replied,—

"Yes, I was. It seems almost disloyal of me to say such a thing; but I am sure you will not misunderstand me. My mother leads a life in which I can take no part; she loves me dearly, however, and I try hard to return her love."

The girl spoke sadly, and with such sweetness, that Percy felt a great pity rising within his heart. He would have uttered sympathetic words, but they had reached the purdah that shut off Zelma's rooms, and were ready to enter.

She raised her shapely hand, on which the same diamonds glittered which Percy had so often idly watched at sea; laying it against the heavy fold, she pressed the curtain back.

"Enter the fairy bower, oh, Prince!" she said, with a happy smile, standing back that he might pass.

He fell into her mood, made her a low bow, and entered. She followed close upon him, letting the curtain drop noiselessly behind her.

The room was well lighted, and looked as though she had only just left it.

But it was not empty.

A handsome, middle-aged native woman confronted him as he stepped into the boudoir; and just behind her stood a turbanned man.

"Here is your—" Percy checked the words, and bit his lips with vexation. He was on the point of saying "ayah!" when a sudden instinct told him that the woman before him, wearing the silk saree in Brahmin fashion, could not be a servant. With his habitual penetration he divined that he was unexpectedly brought face to face with Zelma's mother.

The girl did not at first see that the room was occupied; but a second later she uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Mother! you here?" she said.

Mrs Anderson smiled placidly, but gave no explanation of her presence. It was the first time, as far as Zelma knew, that her mother had ever been in any other part of the house than her own rooms, except to go down by some private staircase to her carriage. Zelma was astonished; but, after the first moment of surprise, she recovered herself, and turning to Percy she introduced her mother to him with a charming dignity and grace. Even Percy was taken aback by her easy, well-bred manner.

"Mrs Anderson, Mr Bell; my cousin Rutnam Iyengar, Mr Bell."

The Brahmin bowed politely, in no way abashed by being discovered an uninvited guest in his English cousin's private sitting-room.

Mrs Anderson advanced towards Percy, and held out her hand with the simplicity of a child, saying in excellent English,—

"I am very pleased to meet any friend of my daughter who is not ashamed of speaking to her native mother."

Percy shook hands gravely with the smiling lady, scarcely knowing how to reply to her childlike speech. He was considerably disturbed at the thought of having so nearly mistaken Mrs Anderson and Rutnam for the ayah and the boy. Now that he knew who Rutnam was, he felt his anger rising rapidly, at what he could not but

think was an unwarrantable intrusion on the part of the young Brahmin. Zelma filled in the pause.

"This is a surprise, dear mother, to find you here. You have never visited my room before. Why have you chosen this evening of all others, when I am so much engaged with my guests below?"

Mrs Anderson might have replied that therein lay the very reason for her choice of time.

Rutnam was afraid lest the Brahmin lady's answer might awaken suspicion, and he answered for her.

"Mrs Anderson was with me on the gallery above the stairs. We were watching your guests. I have never seen a European entertainment of this kind, and I begged your mother to allow me to come to her rooms. But I fear I have intruded; I apologise most humbly."

"Oh, do not apologise, Rutnam," said Zelma, with quick generosity; "you know that my father and I are always glad that mother should feel free to see her relations when she pleases." Her natural politeness made her couple her father's name with her own. "But I own I am astonished to find you here, in my room, for you can see nothing of the ball here."

The girl drew herself up unconsciously, and gazed at the Brahmin, as though she waited for an explanation.

"We were on the gallery, and, hearing voices on the stairs, we hoped to escape observation by retreating here. You have run us to earth, however, and it only remains to us to crave your pardon," said Rutnam, in his suave tones.

"It needs no apology if it happened thus. But I am afraid you have seen very little."

"Quite enough to be pleased and interested. And now, if Mrs Anderson will allow me, I will go back to her room."

Bowing to Percy and Zelma, Rutnam moved to the curtain, and held it aside for Mrs Anderson to pass through. In the presence of Europeans, the young Brahmin knew how to assume a courteous manner.

"Good-night, mother dear," said Zelma, and, bending towards the comely dame, she kissed her forehead.

Her mother patted the girl's fair shoulder; took the emerald pendant in her fingers and looked at it, with the fondness of a child for sparkling toys; then she walked in a leisurely manner through the doorway, where Rutnam still held the purdah, and they both vanished.

Hidden in the Brahmin's pocket was a wax impression of the two locks which fastened the heavy door of the iron safe, where Zelma kept her jewels.

END OF VOL. I.

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